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Canadian charities respond to 'worst drought in 60 years'

Bethany Van Lingen

In Kenya, drought has left an estimated 3.5 million people hungry, UN reports say. That number is expected to increase in coming weeks, and staff at Canadian charities worry whether they'll be able to raise enough money to meet the needs.

"Famines are not the easiest catastrophes to fundraise for," says Janet Johnson, vice president of fundraising at World Vision.

The drought and resulting famine have been devastating. The UN says that 12 million people in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia have been affected by the drought and need help.

"With the disasters in Haiti and Japan, we saw hundreds of thousands of people gone in minutes. But with a famine, millions of people are displaced, malnourished and at risk of disease. It's a harder thing for people here to imagine," says Johnson, 42, of Cambridge, Ont.

North Americans can become frustrated with what they see as continual famines in eastern Africa, says Jacqueline Koster of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC).

"But when you take the time to understand the root causes of the famine, it's a very complex situation. It's not entirely man-made or natural," says Koster, disaster response manager for the CRWRC in eastern and southern Africa.

Kenya is a near-desert area. It is not uncommon for the country to receive very little rainfall.

A majority of Kenyans travel about the countryside, feeding their livestock off the land. Their lifestyle is not sustainable, says Wayne de Jong, CRWRC director of disaster response and rehabilitation.

12 million East Africans face starvation, displacement. CRWRC

Their crops are not resistant to drought, failing as soon as the rain did. The livestock, without enough grazing or water, went hungry.

"Their livestock – their source of food, clothing and shelter – were dying," says Robert Fox, executive director of Oxfam.

So the people went hungry. Desperate, they began to travel to refugee camps, the trek for food putting them at even greater risk of malnourishment and disease.

'Wiped out' without water

The CRWRC is used to dealing with droughts during the short rain period, which runs from October to November. However, this year the drought struck during the long rain period, the rains failing from March through to May 2011. Unfortunately, "the short rain is not forecast to be very good either," Jacqueline Koster, 31, says.

With the last drought in 2009, most of the Kenyans' herds were completely wiped out. Just as they were beginning to rebuild their herds, another drought hit. Food prices are high. During shortages, cattle raiding, already a part of the culture, happens more often.

"If we provide the basics of life," says Koster, "but you must risk your own life to bring your cows out for water, we are obviously doing something wrong."

The CRWRC already delivers food aid to 3500 households. From August until December 2011, they plan to gradually increase that number to 10,500 households. If the short rain fails and the harvest is poor in January 2012, CRWRC will need to continue food aid beyond December.

Herds have been decimated.

The organization provides food aid, maize, beans, cooking oil and salt, as well as water and fodder for livestock. With support, the organization hopes that Kenyans will choose to stay in their villages,

See **Drought** *on page 2*

Re-thinking 'tough on crime'

Chandra Pasma

OTTAWA, Ont. – Imagine that you experience a home invasion. A window is broken, a thief gets in, and a few valuables are stolen. The total damage is about $500, but you feel angry and betrayed. So you invest in a security system to make sure that it doesn't happen again. You pay $1000 for an alarm on all your doors and windows, linked to a security company.

The following year, your home is safe from break-ins. "Hmmm," you think, "that security system really worked. I'm going to make it even stronger." So you pay another $1000 for motion detector lights and upgrades to the alarm system.

The third year, still break-in free, you decide that the security system is working so well that you now want to include a $1000 security perimeter around your property. You have now spent $3000 to make yourself feel safe, six times the amount of money the actual crime itself cost you. And you have continued to spend, despite the fact that you are not still being targeted by crime.

Sounds like an expensive way to deal with a non-problem, doesn't it? Yet this is what the federal government is doing with its "Tough on Crime" agenda – it is spending ever-increasing amounts of money to deal with a problem that is actually declining in size.

Increasing jail time doesn't decrease crime, research shows.

Recent Statistics Canada data reveals that the crime rate in

See **Crime** *on page 2*

News

Drought *continued*

rather than travelling long distances to refugee camps.

In the long term, the CRWRC is looking to install boreholes – water reservoirs locked until a period of drought. The wells are dug from bedrock, without any risk of contamination from topsoil. Costing about $17,000 each, the CRWRC has plans to install seven, fully-funded boreholes in coming years.

CRWRC

Aid groups are distributing emergency food rations at capacity.

CRWRC

"I'm incredibly fortunate that I've been able to help in such an immediate sense," says Koster. "But sometimes I have to say no, because the funding isn't there. That's a very humbling experience. You have to pray that the remaining 9.9 million [people] are able to receive the help that you were able to give the 100,000."

Koster travels between seven countries in Africa as the disaster response staff worker. She is currently staying in Nairobi, Kenya.

Jacqueline Koster (wearing scarf) with CRWRC's team in Kenya, August 4. CRWRC

But Koster and other CRWRC staff are not present in Somalia. The CRWRC has been prevented access to Somalia by the country's leader.

Thousands of Somalians have been fleeing their country to refugee camps in Kenya, where they can get the help that's not available in a country without a stable government or comprehensive infrastructure.

"At this point, it's a question of survival, really," de Jong, 54, of Hamilton, Ont. says.

However, he continues, CRWRC does plan to set up a feeding station near the Somalian border, 200 kilometres from the Dadaab camp in northeastern Kenya. According to United Nations reports, the camp already houses an estimated 400,000 Somalis.

'Thanks for not forgetting'

The CRWRC hopes to reach 10,000 people through the feeding station in Dhobley, Somalia. There are many other organizations involved in relief for the east Africa famine. Oxfam has begun educating the displaced in refugee camps about hygiene.

"We are training people who are nomadic, self-reliant, resilient and dispersed and who suddenly find themselves living in an instant city," Fox, of Ottawa, says.

Oxfam has also purchased portions of the flocks of suffering herders, giving the money to the family for food and slaughtering the animals to feed the community.

"No one else in the community was buying sheep or goats. No one had food to feed them," Fox, 57, says.

World Vision has raised three million dollars to date through mailing donors, online donation requests and media coverage. Their target is five million. The money will be used directly for food aid.

"Often when we [at the CRWRC] give out aid, we hear them say, 'Thank you for not forgetting about us.' It's great to say that the money to do these things has come from Canada, where people care about the things that are happening to you," Koster concludes.

Bethany Van Lingen (bethany.vanlingen@gmail.com) is a first-year Bachelor of Journalism student at Ryerson University in Toronto.

Crime *continued*

Canada has diminished to a level not seen since 1973. Crime severity is also falling: the Crime Severity Index, which tracks changes in the relative seriousness of crimes reported to police, is the lowest ever recorded since the measure was introduced in 1998.

There are those who might argue that this means the "Tough on Crime" agenda is working, but the data suggests otherwise. The crime rate has been dropping steadily for the last 20 years, signaling that the drop is attributable to demographic and social factors rather than criminal justice policy of the last five years.

Enough on crime

But while the crime rate has been steadily falling, the budget for Correctional Services Canada has been steadily increasing. Between 2006 and 2011, federal government spending on corrections has increased 87 percent, from $1.6 billion a year to $2.98 billion a year. By 2013-14, spending will increase further still to $3.15 billion a year.

This increase in spending is linked to two principal causes. The first is the fact that the Conservative government's "Tough on Crime" agenda is increasing both the number of prisoners and the length of time they spend in prison. Of 41 different crime bills the Conservatives have introduced since 2006 (some of them multiple times due to prorogations and elections), nearly half have a direct impact on the number of prison inmates or the length of their sentences. New mandatory minimum sentences, the elimination of conditional sentences for certain crimes, abolition of early parole and tougher rules to qualify for parole, limits on statutory release and elimination of two-for-one credit for time served before sentencing are all driving up the number of prisoners in Canada.

The second cause is the rising cost to incarcerate just one prisoner – the average cost per prisoner in Canada has risen from $88,067 a year in 2006 to $109,699 in 2009. This is a result of rising health care costs – infectious diseases run rampant in prisons – and the outcome of overcrowding, which requires more spending on security.

And what do we get for our increased spending on incarceration? Studies have shown that harsher punishments increase the rate at which people re-offend once released. Jails serve as crime schools, and the more we lock up non-violent offenders with violent offenders, the greater the effect. Prison can also reduce future opportunities due to stigmatization, reduced earning potential and fewer community ties.

Tough luck

From a public justice perspective, the emphasis on increased incarceration is also very troubling since the poor, the mentally ill and Aboriginal Canadians are impacted most. The vast majority of Canadian prisoners are poor and suffer from chronic unemployment, illiteracy, and low educational attainment. A high proportion struggle with substance abuse and mental illness, resulting in rates of suicide and self-harm seven times higher inside prison than outside. And Aboriginal Canadians have an incarceration rate nine times higher than non-Aboriginal Canadians.

Incarceration also has a very negative impact on families. Children with a parent in prison are more likely to be underachievers in school, to be involved in gangs, to suffer from mental illness or substance abuse, and to be involved in crime themselves. In fact, according to a US study, children of incarcerated parents are six times more likely to be incarcerated themselves some day. Even once the parent is released, families struggle with poverty as incarceration has a significant long-term impact on wages, reducing annual wages by 40 percent.

Harper's omnibus crime bill will send more young offenders to 'crime school.'

Because of the "Tough on Crime" agenda, we are now paying more for worse outcomes for individuals, families and communities. And we are doing this despite the fact that cheaper alternatives are just as, if not more, effective. Restorative justice approaches are less expensive, can reduce recidivism, and help victims, offenders, and communities to heal together and move on. Investing in poverty reduction, literacy programs, education and job training can all help to deal with the root causes of crime.

Tough on crime is not smart on crime. It's also not a wise investment of our taxpayer dollars. It's nothing more than an expensive way to assuage outraged feelings.

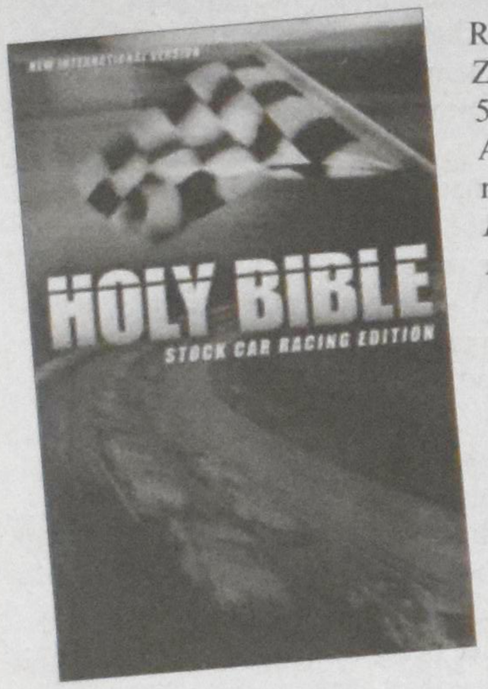
Chandra Pasma is a policy analyst with Citizens for Public Justice, a Christian public policy organization based in Ottawa.

Rupert Murdoch: Bible mogul

Will Braun

Billionaire media titan Rupert Murdoch has made headlines over the phone hacking scandal that forced him to shut down his British tabloid, *News of the World*. But few people know that News Corp, the company Murdoch heads, also owns Zondervan, the world's leading Bible publisher.

In addition to its troubled British holdings, News Corp, which took in $32.7 billion last year, also owns Fox TV, *The Wall Street Journal*, 20th Century Fox and dozens of other media outlets. It acquired Zondervan in 1988.



Based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan sells over 500 styles of the Bible. And though you may not own the *Precious Princess Bible, Camo Bible* (imagine "Holy Bible" on a camouflage cover), or the *Stock Car Racing Bible,* you probably have a Zondervan Bible in your house. Mine is a plain old New International Version (NIV).

The NIV remains a top seller; over 300 million copies have sold worldwide. That's good news for Murdoch because Zondervan owns the exclusive North American print rights to the NIV. Zondervan also publishes books by Christian authors like Rick Warren, Tim LaHaye, Jim Wallis, Eugene Peterson, Brian McLaren and Shane Claiborne.

But what are we to make of the mix of billionaire tycoonery, dingy tabloid dealings and the Holy Word of God? What are we to make of the fact that every time we buy a Zondervan product we fuel a media conglomerate that appears to care more about profit than integrity?

Minimal compromises

I asked Shane Claiborne. His books, *Jesus for President* (co-written with Chris Haw) and *The Irresistible Revolution,* are number 3 and 4 on Zondervan's top seller list. He has long been aware of the Zondervan-Murdoch connection.

I admire Claiborne, partly because he lives out his faith in the "abandoned corners of empire." His particular corner is the impoverished Kensington neighbourhood of Philadelphia. Given his relation to "empire," I wanted to know why he chose a News Corp company as his publisher?

"I want to have the broadest readership possible," Claiborne says by phone, "I don't want to be someone who just speaks to the choir." He says smaller publishers have their advantages but the books he has written for them cost "two or three times" what they would if Zondervan published them.

Claiborne says the key is to "protect the integrity of the message." If he is convinced the medium won't change the message, he will work with organizations despite not "[agreeing] with all of their approaches or decisions."

But even if the message is protected, his work helps enrich a rather well-maintained corner of empire. He feels "conflicted" about this. "I don't think that the world exists in 100 percent pure and 100 percent impure options," he says.

There's good and bad in each of us, he says. "We are called to work on the log in our own eye, and I'm sure as heck trying to work on the compromises that I make so that those are minimal when it comes to integrity."

He makes a good point. Demonizing Rupert Murdoch or Zondervan is not wise. No rendition of the Bible would condone that. Nonetheless, I'm not ready to say, like Maureen Girkin did in 2008 when she was CEO of Zondervan, that "News Corp is a wonderful media giant."

Nor do I think the Bible should be treated as a business opportunity. We should be able to read about "the least of these" without paying dues to the greatest.

Or perhaps Murdoch is just a gifted businessman who enables the distribution of important materials. Perhaps writers like Claiborne are subverting or redeeming something in need of redemption. Perhaps I overstate the link between *News of the World* and Zondervan. It's just that I believe there should be no link at all. Bald greed has no place in Bible publishing.

Christianity does not require the help of an unscrupulous media empire. The Good News will be just fine without News Corp.

Part of me would love to see readers (and writers) humbly decline any participation in the big Bible business. But a Bible boycott feels odd. My colleague Aiden Enns – who once cut the Zondervan label out of the spine of his Bible in protest – suggests that every time we buy a Zondervan purchase we pay a 10 percent tithe or "sin tax" to a charity.

The* Good News *will be just fine without News Corp.

Personally, I don't want a penny of my money going to fuel the News Corp empire. Fortunately for me, the last time I crossed paths with Shane Claiborne he gave me a copy of the most recent Zondervan publication he collaborated on, *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*. I offered him warm thanks – it's a great book – then said with a smirk, "this way none of my money needs to go to Zondervan."

*Will Braun attends Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. A version of this article first appeared on Braun's "Holy Moly" blog on the Geez magazine website (**geezmagazine.org**).*

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Editorials

Investing in our *offgesprungen* kids

Bert Witvoet

Sometimes I daydream and wish I were a millionaire. It's a foolish kind of daydream to have, especially because I don't believe that money can make me happy. The reason I *do* daydream about it the odd time is not because I am unhappy with my lot in life or that I don't have enough money. No, it's because I think our children don't have enough money. I think of all the mortgages they carry and all the other obligations they have to meet or can't afford to meet.

So in my dream I find my wife and myself inheriting a big sum of money from a stinking rich relative who doesn't exist. But who cares? Such is the stuff that dreams are made of.

Or I daydream that we have won the lottery. But how can that happen when we are against lotteries and never buy a ticket? Ah, someone else bought a lottery ticket for us without our approval. Had they asked we would have firmly told them not to do it. But they didn't ask, and now that the money is shoved in our hands, what are we to do? Throw the money into the garbage pail? Give it to a Christian cause? Our church and Christian school would refuse the money because they have these strange scruples about accepting lottery money, scruples which I share when I am wide awake but which I think are silly when I am in a semi-conscious state of mind. I know what we could do. We could pass the money on to our children who are much more pragmatic about these things then I am. Or are they? Hmm . . . I have never asked them that question.

But then I think about it again, and I realize that even my seemingly laudable concern about helping out our children financially is at heart a foolish kind of self-indulgence. First of all, none of them have given any indication that they are unhappy about not being rich. Oh, they may mention that they have a big mortgage monster to feed once a month, but that notion registers very low on their scale of complaints. So why do I want to rescue them from what is their own life of decisions and responsibilities? Are they less able to take a few financial setbacks than my wife and I were when we were at the most expensive time of our life? Is God not the God of my children and grandchildren the way he was for us? Why should I want to take away their challenges?

Years ago, someone told me not to invest so much in our children, and he meant emotionally. I didn't agree with him then and I don't agree with him now. The direction of emotional investment is mostly downward, from parents to children, as it should be. But in other ways he may have been right. Getting married and leaving the parental home is about leaving and cleaving, I am told. At least, I myself left and cleft.

But to come back to my foolish daydreams – being rich is not all it's cracked up to be. The other day I listened to comedian Chris Rock talking with Oprah Winfrey. She recalled a statement he had once made that really impressed her. He had said, "Being wealthy is not so much about having a lot of money, but about having lots of options." Winfrey thought that was a most profound observation. Of course, she, like Chris, was dirt poor at one time. So she knows what it is like to be poor and to be rich, and she much prefers being rich. And so both Chris and Winfrey have concluded that it's not the money that is important, but it's what they can do with the money. They can drive a Ferrari or they can get behind the wheel of a Chevy. They can live in Cape Town or in New York City or in both cities. Life is full of options. Wouldn't the poor love to have many options? I asked myself. Isn't that what makes being rich so desirable?

That depends on what you mean by being rich. My cousin emailed me a power point story recently that ended with the statement: "The richest person is not the one who has the most, but the one who needs the least."

Ouch! I know how to apply that to myself. Why don't I apply that to my children?

Bert Witvoet has the option of living in the north end or the south end of St. Catharines, Ontario, where real estate prices are one third of what they are in Vancouver.

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Thrift as gift

Sara DeMoor

A few months ago, my siblings and I had decided not to *buy* my Dad anything for his upcoming 65th birthday. Instead, each sibling's family committed to creating a whole bunch of note cards or other items to include in a "memory box" gift. We sent emails to Dad's friends and family far and near asking them to share memories, stories, or tributes to our Dad to include in the recycled shoebox that we would give to him.

Lest you imagine we are dreadfully cheap (or poverty-stricken) children, I should explain that we made this decision about Dad's gift because we knew that this would be what he would appreciate more than any tie, golf balls or watch we could buy him. You see, my Dad is what one might call "thrifty." He is the master at reusing . . . everything. The basement of my parents' house and their garage are full of random tools and parts from items that "just might come in handy someday."

Dad's thrifty way of life *has* often come in handy for our family, including me. For example, I recently showed Dad that the handle on my rolling carry-on suitcase was broken; only one of the two retractable poles worked on what was otherwise a perfectly good suitcase. I thought I was going to have to get a new one. A week later Dad returned my suitcase to me with the handles in perfect working order. It turns out he, "by chance," had found a match for the unusual missing part in the basement.

As we discussed Dad's gift, my siblings and I realized that every one of us had included a note for Dad's "memory box" gift about his thrifty ways. Some of us called it "stewardship," another talked about Dad's efforts at "conservation of resources," and we even teased him about hoarding. But as we talked about it, we each expressed deep appreciation for the way our Dad (and Mom) seem naturally inclined to use less in general, to reuse everything possible, to fix before throwing out and to be content with what they have.

The lure of stuff

Dictionary.com defines *thrift* as a noun meaning "economical management; economy; frugality." These qualities seem antiquated today. In a culture that popularizes purchasing power and admires people with the most (and the most expensive) stuff, thrift is often treated in a patronizing way – as a cute, admirable, but totally irrelevant quality embodied by our grandparents. I don't need to tell you how North Americans are constantly bombarded by messages that promote buying more stuff, newer stuff and the *latest* fashion. In an era obsessed with economic growth, frugality is considered cute at best, and dangerous at worst. Recall how President George W. Bush called on Americans to respond to the September 11th terrorist attacks: Go shopping! (The exact quote from his September 21st, 2011, speech is: "I ask your continued participation and confidence in the American economy.")

Shopping at thrift stores is written off as a rite of the "rebellious" teenaged and young adult years. Consumer goods are now manufactured to break down soon. Fixing items is usually more expensive than buying a new one; furthermore, most of my generation wouldn't have a clue how to fix a suitcase, or anything else for that matter.

At the same time, we are now being inundated with messages about the ongoing destruction of the natural world, the rapid human consumption of the world's resources and "being green" is all the rage. The recent debt crisis in the United States (not alone in its national debt issues) and the continued rise in household debt in Canada illustrate that we – both as individuals and as nations – have not prioritized thrift, frugality or saving as our values. The Western response to national recessions is to GO BUY MORE STUFF to spur on the economy. I doubt that doing so will truly solve our economic problems. Isn't the definition of insanity doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results?

It's time for Christians – and North Americans in general – to recapture the seemingly lost value of *thrift* (and its corollary trait, *contentment*), to resist the pressure to buy the next best thing. We are reminded again and again in Scripture that we are stewards, not simply owners or consumers, of all we have and all we manage.

By the way, if you happen to need anything repaired, I know someone who might have just the part you're looking for.

Sara Gerritsma DeMoor (sara.L.demoor@gmail.com) is an associate campus chaplain with the Christian Reformed Church at the University of Toronto, and also works part-time at an Anglican church in Toronto.

Letters

Narrow definitions won't help planet

Dr. John Hiemstra, in his "Playing dice with the planet" (*CC*, July 25), prefaces his comments by saying, "I am not an environmentalist." This reminds me of the 1970s, when many people began their arguments for allowing women into church office with the disclaimer, "I am not a feminist." I was a feminist then, as I am now, believing that God has called both genders to serve him. Feminists work for equality of opportunities, not equal identity. Environmentalists hope to raise awareness of the planet's woes, and to effect changes that will relieve the pressure on air, water and soil.

Clearly, Dr. Hiemstra is on the same page as I am when it comes to his concern for planet earth, yet I would readily call myself an environmentalist. I'm deeply concerned that our greedy, wasteful lifestyles are destroying the planet and its wonderful creatures at an unprecedented rate. If we are to make any headway in our effort to raise broader awareness of this issue, it would seem vital to cooperate with environmentalists of all stripes, whether they make a fine distinction between ecology and environment or not. Raising barriers by defining ourselves too narrowly will not help.

Ecology: *the branch of biology that deals with the relation of living things to the environment and to each other.*

Environment*: all of the surrounding things, conditions, and influences affecting the growth and development of living things* (World Book dictionary).

In other words, Dr. Hiemstra and I are both concerned about what is happening to living things – ourselves and our offspring included. Let's work together.

Anne van Arragon Hutten
Kentville, Nova Scotia

A simple meal, some change and a jar

When a disaster like the food crisis in east Africa hits the news, how can families with young children respond? That's the question we asked ourselves when our children were small. We wanted to respond meaningfully to food needs around the world. But little kids don't have much money to give. And what does famine, or not having enough to eat, mean to a North American child, anyway?

The approach we decided to take was to eat one simple meal each week for a month. In our case, we settled on buttered toast. We could eat as much as we wanted, but it could only be toast with butter – nothing else.

The idea behind the exercise was not to try to avoid eating; adults can decide to do that, but it wouldn't be appropriate for small children. Rather, it was a symbolic way of understanding that not everyone in the world eats as well as we do.

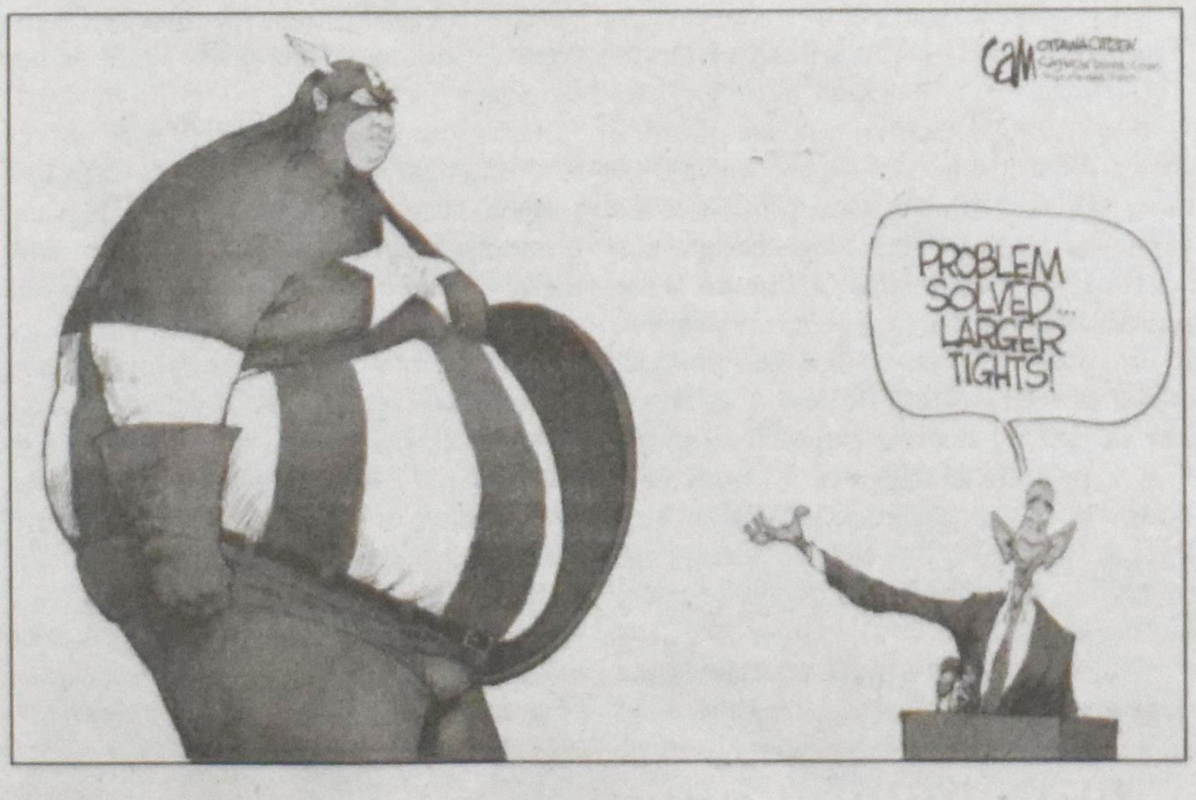
Before each meal, we talked about food needs around the world, prayed a grace of thanks for having enough to eat, and asked God to help those who were hungry. After the meal, we estimated the amount of money we saved by not eating a regular meal and put it into a jar; our children were invited to add any change they wanted to give, too.

After each simple meal, we added more change to the jar. The jar was left on the kitchen counter, a visual reminder of our commitment to help others, and of the needs of people in the developing world.

At the end of the month, we donated the money we had collected to an international development organization – Mennonite Central Committee, in our case.

It was a meaningful experience for our family – and one we plan to repeat again during this food crisis in eastern Africa, even though our children are now teenagers.

John Longhurst
Canadian Foodgrains Bank



Called to serve in any job

In a recent article, Bob Zomermaand suggests that pastors have a "sacred calling" (*CC*, July 11). That sounds more like a Catholic understanding of ministers than a Reformed one. It suggests that ministers have a holier calling than a truck driver, a teacher or a housewife. Certainly, starting with Luther, that kind of dualistic approach to work was debunked. Zomermaand's suggestion creates a rift between the priesthood/ministers and laity, something we can do without.

Bert den Boggende
Brooks, Alberta

Interested in writing?

Christian Courier is looking for a new columnist to contribute one 750-word article per month in the area of family life/parenting. Interested and experienced writers should send two sample articles to editor@christiancourier.ca by September 30. Content should reflect the principles of God's sovereignty and our mandate to interact with and reform culture. View some of our current columnists at **christiancourier.ca**.

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News

European politician calls on new generation to defend Christianity

ROME (CNA) – A man who has been described as one of Europe's foremost Christian political thinkers has called for a new generation of politicians to defend and promote orthodox Christian ideals. "We need people with conscience in politics," said Rocco Buttiglione, vice-president of the Italian Parliament's Chamber of Deputies.

"I think the great reservoir of values today is in the Christian people and we must tell them, you must make politics, you must enter into politics, you must make with your hands the future of the land," said Buttiglione recently.

Buttiglione made political headlines around the world in 2004 when his nomination as Italy's representative to the European Union's commission was blocked due to his beliefs on issues such as homosexuality. But the parliamentarian is not bitter about that episode.

"Good things have a high price, but they are worth it, of course." If you want to be a Christian in politics "sometimes you have to make sacrifices and value your conscience more than your position, more than your seat in politics," he said. "But would you trust a man that put his political career higher than his conscience?"

Several young Catholic politicians in Italy have responded to Buttiglione's challenges. One of them, Simone Budini, 24, has co-founded a new Italian political party, Giovani Liberi e Forti (Young, Free and Strong) which he says is based on Catholic social principles.

As well as being a frontline politician Rocco Buttiglione is also a renowned academic. He is a professor of political science at Saint Pius V University in Rome and a member of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. It is from this standpoint that he observes worrying historical parallels for contemporary politics.

"I think that we very often forget that democracy is a very delicate creature," he stated, pointing toward the first flourishing of democracy in ancient Greece which collapsed after 171 years.

"What is the reason that Greek democracy died?" he asked. "Because of moral relativism, corruption," he answered, adding that the moral relativists of today are, in fact, the intellectual descendents of the sophists of ancient Greece. "Western democracies run the danger of dying because political activity is not based on principals."

Despite the dire predictions, the 63-year-old academic and politician is not without hope for the future. The key to success, he said, lies with a five-letter word – truth.

"We must bring truth to politics again. We must be able to tell the truth to the people. Very often politicians don't tell the truth. Very often politicians tell the people what they want to hear. And, what the people very often want to hear is not the truth."

Egypt: We're at a crossroads, says missionary

CAIRO, Egypt (Fides) – Egypt is now at a crossroads and could become either a more democratic society or an Islamic state, according to an Italian missionary there.

"In recent days there were clashes between the young revolutionaries and members of the Muslim Brotherhood," says Luciano Verdoscia. "The young protagonists of the revolution in previous months would like a more democratic government," while the Muslim Brotherhood has "a considerable organizational capacity."

"The young protagonists of the revolution [who forced the resignation of President Munbarak] would like a more democratic government," says Luciano. "These young people are from cities and are able to handle the most modern means of communication, such as social network. On the other hand, the Muslim Brotherhood have a considerable organizational capacity and especially appeal to religious identity. One must keep in mind that even a good part of the Egyptian population lives in rural areas. These people have no culture and their identity is only religious."

Verdoscia added, "The revolution was able to overthrow the authoritarian system of Mubarak, but we do not yet have a clear idea of what Egypt will become, one navigates in the dark."

In a recent demonstration in Cairo's Tahrir Square, demonstrators chanted, "'Islam, Islam, we do not want a liberal state," "the people want Sharia," and "'Islamic, neither Western nor Eastern."

Syria: Unrest threatens Christian presence in Middle East

DAMASCUS, Syria (VR) –The current political upheaval in Syria "has implications not just for Syria itself but for the region, in particular for Christianity in the region," says a leading Christian analyst.

Anthony O'Mahony, who directs the Centre for Eastern Christianity at London's Heythrop College, says that the bid to unseat Syrian leader Bashir al Assad poses grave dangers for the country's Christian minority. The collapse of the regime, he warned, could lead to new attacks on Christians – just as the fall of the Baath regime in Iraq led to a campaign of violence and intimidation against Christians in that country.

In Syria today, Christians can practice their faith openly. The rise of an Islamic regime – or of a regime that allows free rein to Islamic militants – could endanger the Christian presence and undermine the confidence of Christians in neighboring countries, says O'Mahony.

Cardinal: Religion 'purifies' politics

DENVER, Colorado (CNA/EWTN News) – Cardinal Raymond Burke, head of the Vatican's highest court, said early this month that without religion in society, political leaders run the risk of violating the fundamental human rights of citizens.

"All nations should guarantee the free exercise of religion, which aims to protect the teaching and practice of religious faith for the sake of the common good," said Burke.

But what is also needed is "reason," he asserted. "When reason is not purified by faith in the political realm, the powerful and influential of the time exercise a tyranny which violates the fundamental rights of the very people whom political leaders are called to serve."

Burke was the keynote speaker at a Knights of Columbus dinner during the Knights' 129th Supreme Convention. Founded in 1882 and named to honor Christopher Columbus, the 1.8 million member group is the world's largest fraternal service organization.

Burke continued, "Even as the first disciples faced a pagan world which had not even heard of our Lord Jesus Christ, so we too face a culture which is forgetful of God and hostile to his law written upon every human heart."

It is modern society's "erroneous notion" of moral law and conscience that has led "to an equally erroneous exclusion of the discussion of the moral law and of questions of conscience from public life." Burke said. "In many so-called advanced nations, we witness an increasing tendency to deny to citizens the most fundamental right, the right to observe the dictates of one's conscience. . . . "

The law inscribed in human hearts

Catholics are included among those who need to get their own house in order, the cardinal insinuated. As an example he cited political leaders who profess to be Catholics "and yet vote for legislation which violates the moral law." Although these politicians claim that they personally believe in moral law, they argue that their political office demands they "follow a different law in making decisions for those whom they represent and govern." Moral law, however, is not "a confessional practice," the cardinal said, but rather "a response to what is inscribed in the depths of every human heart."

"Religious faith plainly articulates the natural moral law," which enables men and women of faith "to recognize more readily what their own human nature and the nature of things demand of them, and to conform their lives to the truth which they recognize," Burke said. "For that reason, religious faith and practice is important for the life of every nation, specifically for the right formation of the conscience of her citizens."

Religious faith, he noted, also serves to evangelize and bring hope to men and women today who are "lost in the unreal and destructive world of moral relativism and, therefore, tempted to despair." Christians today, Burke noted, "struggle with those who would falsely exclude the purifying and illuminating service of faith," and "those who would insist that, when it comes to civic life, we must bracket our religious faith, even to the point of violating our own conscience."

But we "must remain steadfast in giving witness to" our faith, Cardinal Burke said, "even in the face of indifference and hostility."

News

India: Christians march on parliament, demand end to discrimination

DELHI, India (CWN) – Nearly 10,000 marched on India's parliament on July 28 demanding an end to legal discrimination against Christian Dalits.

Dalits are the lowest caste of people in India's Hindu tradition: the group is also known as "untouchables." The word literally means "trampled upon."

Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist Dalits are now eligible for free education and quotas in government hiring. That change came about as part of a broad effort to improve their socio-economic status. But those statutory privileges are still denied to Christian Dalits, who account for two thirds of 27 million Christians in India.

Successive governments have ignored the Christian demand for equality. Hindu groups oppose the extension of these rights to Christian Dalits, fearing that such a change in policy could trigger mass conversions to Christianity.

One Christian leader who participated in the march described the continued neglect of the Christian demand as "blatant discrimination."

The march to parliament was preceded by a three-day hunger strike on July 25-27. Hundreds of Dalit Christian activists from across the country participated.

New Jersey: Man ordered to remove cross from his front yard

LIVINGSTON, N.J. (CCO) – Citing zoning ordinances officials in Livingston, New Jersey, have twice ordered a homeowner to remove a cross from his front yard.

Patrick Racaniello placed the first cross in his yard as part of his Lenten celebration last spring. The cross meaasured 31-by-19 inches. Police ordered him to remove it following a complaint from a neighbor.

Township officials told Racaniello that he would be subject to a fine. They insisted that the cross violated an ordinance that prohibits postings on a structure on one's property (including a tree) if that posting is "calculated to attract the attention of the public."

When first advised of the ordinance Racaniello removed the cross. But later he built a second, much larger cross that he planted on his property just within the township's 10-foot right-of-way. Racaniello, again facing fines, took down that cross, too.

In the meantime he contacted the Alliance Defense Fund, an organization of Christian lawyers who defend "the right to hear and speak the Truth through strategy, training, funding, and direct litigation."

A distraction

ADL spokesperson Jonathan Scruggs said, "We believe this is private property, and therefore he has a right to engage in this expression. We believe that either cross is protected by the First Amendment." The First Amendment is part of the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution, which, among other things, guarantees freedom of speech and "the free exercise of religion," and prohibits the government from favoring one faith over another.

Livingston's attorney, Sharon Weiner, is still fighting the right-of-way cross, which she says is "a distraction to the traveling public." But the town has conceded that Racaniello

and other property owners may fasten crosses (or whatever else) on their trees if they are not in the 10-foot right-of-way. Rights-of-way are for all practical purposes extensions of homeowners' yard. They are strips of land appropriated by a municipality as road buffers and/or for the placement of public sidewalks.

Charles C. Haynes, a First Amendment scholar, said a federal law enacted by the U.S. Congress a decade ago could trump the township's regulations. In part, the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 says government entities cannot impose a land-use regulation that burdens a person's free exercise of religion unless there is "a compelling governmental interest." That regulation must also be the least restrictive to religious practice, the act says.

Thus burden of proof could fall on Livingston, said Haynes, a senior scholar at the non-partisan First Amendment Center. "Under current law, I think this guy has a pretty strong case. I'm not sure what the township thinks is a problem.... It might mean that the town has a problem."

Japan, Korea in need of prayer warriors

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – In October, Prayer Missions International and Christian Reformed World Missions will join together to lead a short-term intercessory prayer mission trip to earthquake-ravaged Japan and to Korea. The earthquake and tsunami, which occurred on March 11 of this year, devastated large sections of northeastern Japan, including a nuclear power plant.

The team, which is still being recruited through supporting churches and agencies, will consist of eight to 10 "prayer warriors" who will pray on-site on behalf of the CRC missionaries serving in Japan and their mission partners, including Koreans.

Many physical and material challenges still remain for CRWM missionaries and for personnel from the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC). CRC missionaries and staff have been involved in assessing the damage, providing emergency assistance and longer-term relief – and in maintaining a spiritual presence during a time of tremendous difficulty.

But the power of prayer, which was unleashed by members of the Christian Reformed Church on behalf of the missionaries following the disaster, has continued throughout the process, helping the missionaries as they do their work. The missionaries express gratitude that the prayers will continue as the ministry prayer team arrives for on-site, hands-on prayer this fall.

Rev. Steve Van Zanen, director for missions education and engagement for CRWM, says this particular trip will be "a tremendous opportunity for individuals to connect with their missionaries and get an inside view of the mission work of the Christian Reformed Church in Japan." The trip will also include a stop in Korea.

"We also believe this experience will change [the prayer warriors'] understanding and practice of prayer for our missionaries and so for our churches as a whole."

'Significant spiritual work'

Prayer Mission International, whose primary ministry is developing and coordinating short-term prayer mission trips to mission sites throughout the world, previously joined with CRWM to visit mission fields in Haiti, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

Rev. Jeong Gho, a CRWM missionary who lives with his family in Tokyo, will help lead the intercessory prayer tour. He asks church members in North America "to join us for this wonderful vision and prayer trip."

Gho has been intensely involved in leading short-term mission trips, as well as in various aspects of the relief and rehabilitation work following the disaster. He has focussed especially in church leadership and growth and in bringing to bear the hope found in Jesus in a chaotic situation.

Gho and his wife, Misook have been compelled countless times to tell the people they encounter about the hope to be found in Jesus, in times of uncertainty and disaster, and at all time. The Ghos say they greatly appreciate all of the prayer support they have received.

The prayer tour will be to encourage the missionaries in their faith, hope and commitment as they continue on with what is often a difficult work, Jeong Gho adds.

Rev. Jon DeBruyn, executive director of Prayer Missions International and a CRC pastor living in Traverse City, Michigan, says, "Prayer mission trips have as their general activity focused times of prayer for the missionaries, their churches, their pastors, diaconal ministries and the community as a whole."

These trips do not entail working in construction or medical work, but do "engage in significant spiritual work. We are part of 'building a wall of righteousness' (Ezekial 22:30) in their communities . . ," says DeBruyn.

The primary activity of these mission trips is prayer for the missionaries and those they work with, the various ministries carried on in a particular area, and prayer for God's blessing and movement in the community as a whole. "The focus of this prayer trip will be to engage in active, powerful, on-site prayer for the missionaries and their work," DeBruyn explains.

The Japan/Korea trip will take place from October 13 to 24. Organizers are looking for people "of some spirituality who believe in the power and effectiveness of prayer."

To learn more about the tour, and to sign up for it, visit the website of ServiceLink, the CRCNA office that connects volunteers with opportunities to serve: **crcna.org/pages/servicelink_pmi_wmprayertrip.cfm**

Columns

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch

Elephant 'logging' benefits neighbours

If I have a stand of five hectares of lodge pole pines and the mountain pine beetle has killed the trees, I might cut them down and sell the marketable timber, using the rest for firewood. Then I have just clear-cut ten acres. Am I evil? A destroyer of natural systems? Should I be censored, the timber from my trees banned from sale by *green* companies?

What if my forest license covers tens of thousands of hectares, and the logging plan means I can cut all the marketable timber in blocks. This means all the dead or dying pine, plus all marketable spruce. In order to do this – whether using horses or small-caterpillars or feller-bunchers and skidders – I will effectively clear-cut a given block. Or is that "patch-logging," a term preferred over clear-cut logging?

If I make a narrow path with a small piece of equipment and log just three older trees in scattered locations, is that "selective logging," a term of approbation? Or did I just remove three old-growth trees, making me an environmental villain?

There is a problem of precision here, and I am not sure if I have used these terms with accuracy. And I keep running into an underlying assumption. It goes like this: "If you care about *nature* [or *creation*], you will do all you can not to interfere with things." This is based, in turn, on an assumption that "Whenever human beings interact with nature, they always goof things up."

Strangely enough, I find these assumptions quite common among Christian people, too. I wonder if, when they sing "This Is My Father's World" or "All Things Bright and Beautiful," they romanticize things and imagine a world without human beings. My friend, Peter Rhebergen, once wrote a remarkable essay for an education class in which he spoke in the persona of an ox-eye daisy: one of the more pernicious, imported weeds afflicting pasture-land in our area. Of course there is not a single ox-eye daisy in any 2,4,D treated lawn. No dandelions either.

On the one hand, we imagine a nature unaffected by people, and on the other we rather ruthlessly control (when we can) the creation in our immediate vicinity. All the while we dream of visiting a park, camping, fishing or sailing in an uncorrupted world. Somewhere else.

Neither good nor always bad

These things cause me some distress. I am from the Louis Agassiz school of naturalists. Agassiz once wrote to a friend, "I spent the summer traveling; I got half-way across my backyard." The Christian conservation organization *A Rocha* tries to rid us of two misconceptions: first, that "having dominion" means "doing anything you want" to the creation; and second, that human beings don't really belong here at all.

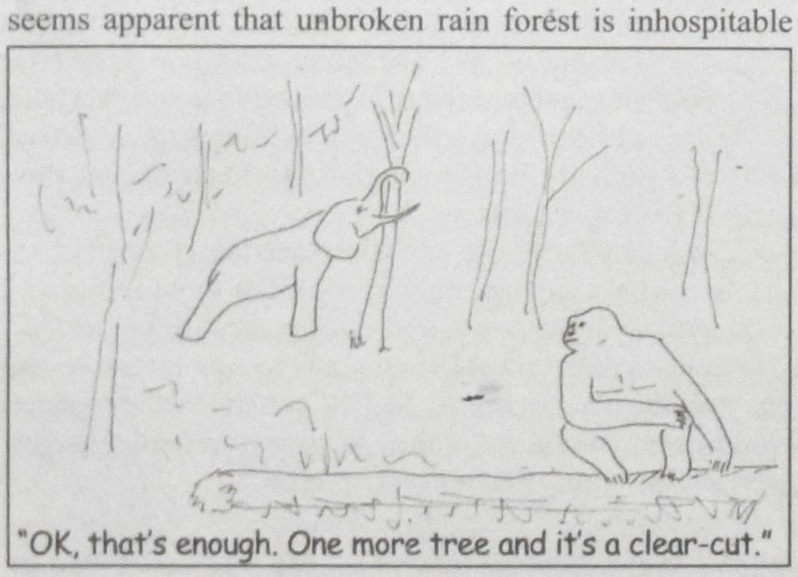
I am eager to hear of stories that dispel either misconception. And I found one in a strange place: a survey of West African wildlife – mainly large mammals – by Peter Matthiessen. Creating clearings actually creates the optimum habitat for many creatures, Matthiessen observes: "More and more it seems apparent that unbroken rain forest is inhospitable habitat for large mammals. Except along the watercourses, or in clearings made by the fall of a giant tree, the available food is mostly in the canopy, far out of reach of okapi and gorilla as well as elephant. In the absence of elephants, which modify the forest by creating and perpetuating second growth, other animals are bound to be scarce as well.

"Jonah [an African pilot and wildlife observer] concludes that, while high human impact will impoverish the forest, moderate impact in the form of shifting cultivation – that is, slash and burn – creates a good deal of secondary forest that is accessible to animals, and that a patchwork of primary and secondary forest is the optimum condition for prosperity as well as diversity in animal populations."

Another observer comments: "One can't say that man's activities are 'good' for wildlife, but neither are they always bad, and this is particularly apparent in the forest."

An occasional clearing is a long way from clear-cutting or even patch-logging. It sounds more like "selective harvest using small-footprint technology." Still: every time one hears of ways in which human activity, intentionally or not, benefits wildlife, or a whole region, I think we should rejoice.

It is possible to "till the earth and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Keeping this world in the palms of hands, guarding its actuality and possibilities, being the "shade at your right hand" (Ps. 121:5) is a wonderful calling, a calling that sometimes, by God's grace, we are enabled to fulfill.



"OK, that's enough. One more tree and it's a clear-cut."

Curt Gesch (curtgesch@hotmail.com) lives on a farm in Quick, B.C., where he spends time planting trees in open spots and making openings in the forest. He wishes he had an elephant to replace the need for a D-8 Caterpillar he occasionally hires.

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom

'It depends . . . .'

From science to policy on vitamin D

"How much vitamin D do I need to be healthy? How much of a vitamin D daily supplement should I take?" If you ask scientists these questions, they will probably start by saying, "It depends . . . ." This response is common among researchers (especially regarding their area of expertise), because they know that any seemingly simple issue is affected by many variables, and there rarely is a straightforward reply. Our Lord's creation is wonderfully rich and complex.

The answer "It depends . . ." may be acceptable when we're chatting over coffee. It's not so great, however, when a government needs to develop a policy: how does one condense all the complex variables surrounding vitamin D to produce a simple, broadly applicable set of rules to guide individuals in their pursuit of health and to assist doctors when writing prescriptions for patients whose particulars they have come to know?

Vitamin D is made by our skin when it is exposed to unfiltered, natural sunlight. How much is made depends on the amount of skin exposed, whether a sun blocker is used, the duration and strength of the sunlight, and apparently one's ethnic background. But unfiltered sunlight also promotes a variety of skin cancers, so people use sun blockers, reducing vitamin D production. If we do not generate enough vitamin D ourselves by being in the sun, it is good for our health to take vitamin D as a dietary supplement (a pill). Particularly in winter, when most of us do not expose a lot of skin to the sun, dietary supplements may be necessary.

A healthy dose of sunshine limits cancer risk but allows for Vitamin D production.

Vitamin D is important to our health because of its role in a variety of biological processes. We have traditionally known about its role in maintaining bone strength, but vitamin D also appears to prevent many diseases, such as various cancers and cardiovascular disease. So maintaining an adequate level may be good for us. The definition of an adequate level, however, is disputed – and not just how much, but also how much is too much; as with any biological agent, at some point more becomes not better but worse.

The happiness vitamin

So the policy question scientists must answer is what to tell the public in terms of daily supplements of vitamin D. Two panels of experts have recently produced conflicting reports. First, an expert panel of the United States Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommended – after 20 months of discussion, in an 1132-page report! – that adequate blood levels can be maintained with about 600 IU of vitamin D (with higher levels for those over 70). This intake can be obtained if people are eating fortified food (such as milk with vitamin D added), so no explicit supplements are needed, says the IOM panel. In fact, the experts argue further that taking more than 4,000 IU could be harmful. In contrast, this past month the Endocrine Society (14,000 clinicians and scientists who study endocrine function) released guidelines recommending an intake of 1,500-2000 IU a day, an amount that would normally require a dietary supplement.

Such disputes in science are not new and usually resolve with time as new research creates a better understanding of the issues and clarifies the consequences of particular policy decisions. With vitamin D, some have suggested that larger clinical trials are needed to see the effects of supplements on the incidence of cancers and cardiovascular diseases. But large, long-term clinical trials are expensive and sometimes, in hindsight, do not look at the relevant variables. It has been suggested that higher levels of vitamin D might reduce rates of multiple sclerosis, but because higher levels might in contrast increase by some percentage the incidence of other diseases, most scientists are cautious about making recommendations that could be found to be flawed eventually – particularly recommending a level that is "too high" (think about the issues that have come to light around hormone replacement for post-menopausal women).

For this and other policy recommendations, we need to accept them with an awareness of their limits. In our Lord's creation, there are things that we can do to promote our health, but we have no guarantee that they will have the desired effect. People who have never smoked sometimes die of lung cancer, and some smokers do not. We are called to live in faith and trust our Lord that he will not permit a hair on our heads to be harmed without his permission (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1).

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who takes vitamin D each day, is a member of Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, ON.

Reviews

Seerveld: Our age needs to rediscover the Genevan Psalms

Marian Van Til

A number of *Christian Courier* readers have had the privilege of knowing or studying under Dr. Calvin Seerveld, or at least of hearing him lecture in his inimical fashion. Seerveld is professor emeritus of philosophical aesthetics at Toronto's Institute for Christian Studies. The author of numerous philosophical and aesthetic works, he also wrote several hymns and a number of the rhymed translations of the Psalms set to Genevan tunes that appear in the Christian Reformed Church's *Psalter Hymnal.*

The lecture-recital on this CD was originally presented at the *Rediscovering Calvin Conference* in June 2009 at the University of Toronto. It is clear in the first few minutes that Seerveld loves the Genevan Psalms – if one hadn't already surmised that love from his own Psalm text settings, several of which are sung here by the Pax Christi Chorale and whose texts appear in print in the accompanying booklet.

"Our age needs the wiry, tentative gritty firmness of the Genevan melodies."

Seerveld's love of the sparse, yet powerful 16th century settings of the Psalms from John Calvin's Geneva is not just a personal preference of no real consequence. He demonstrates for all of us the peculiar strength and pungency of the Genevan tunes wedded with the Psalms, the Bible's "song book" – and how the changing use of the Psalms in the church over the centuries brought us to Geneva, and then beyond.

Seeveld's short foray into church-musical history gives listeners a taste of some of the eight church modes (precursors to the modern major-minor scale system) and explains that the different character of each mode was imminently suited to the different character of their texts.

Beginning with a selection of Gregorian chants, Seerveld carefully chooses several handfuls of church music from across the centuries that provided the context for the development of the Genevan Psalms. From a Reformation "Lauda" to the famous polyphonic Ave Maria motet by Josquin des Prez, he points out the capacity for these musical expressions to both inspire awe and connect to the earthiness of ordinary life. Seerveld ties Luther's vernacular setting of Psalm 130, for example, to the plague and the deathly havoc it wrought.

Following this historical lead-in, we're ready to learn about what was going on in Geneva and Strasbourg, and how Calvin versified some of the Psalms for singing in French to melodies by Clement Marot and several others. Calvin embarked on a "life-long project to put the Psalms in the mouths of ordinary people" – both in church and at home. By 1562 Calvin and composer Louis Bourgeois had put together the *Genevan Psalter*.

Seerveld decries the misconceptions about the Genevan Psalms as being either boring or "derivative patchworks of street songs." In reality, he argues, they are far more than "only austere." Many have syncopated, rollicking beats (occasioning Elizabeth I's jibe that they were irreverent "Geneva jigs"). Seerveld believes the Genevan Psalms deserve rediscovery. They are simple and personally devout, and in that regard not unlike much contemporary Christian music.

Seerveld rightly argues that Calvin's insistence on singing *only* the Psalms is not a reason to not sing them at all. Seerveld insists we also need to sing *whole* Psalms, in their integrity, without leaving out their laments, despair, anger at God. He concludes, and I concur, "Our age needs the wiry, tentative gritty firmness of the Genevan melodies."

I myself have been a near-life-long lover of the Genevan Psalms. If I hadn't been – or if you aren't – would this lecture-recital win me or you over? I'm not entirely sure. If you don't have any background in church history or (church) music history, you may find some of this hard slogging at first. I'd encourage listening a second time. We learn much of our theology from what we sing in church. That being the case, and considering that what's being regularly sung in so many churches is as biblically and musically deficient as it is, Seerveld's solution of rediscovering Geneva is good and necessary.

The Gift of Genevan Psalmody for Today Sprung from its Historical Context. CD.
Lecture-recital by Calvin Seerveld and the Pax Christi Chorale, Stephanie Martin, director. Recorded Jan. 2011.

On the technical side the recording quality here is excellent. The chorale singers as a unit have a lovely, pure tone quality which is best suited to the Gregorian chant in Latin. Their German pronunciation, however, is too prissy-sweet and, ironically, misses the pungency and punch of Luther's music/text that Seerveld talks of. And their rather odd English pronunciation sounds contrived. It, too, lacks the "guts" the Genevan tunes need to effect their best, powerful work.

One other small drawback. There's no English translation of the German and French stanzas of "Aus Tiefer Not," "Ein Christlich Lied" ("Nun freut euch") and Psalm 51, as there are with the Latin and Italian texts. It should not have been assumed that listeners know German and/or French.

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC *editor living in Youngstown, NY.*

Malick's moving masterpiece wins Canne's *Palm d'Or*

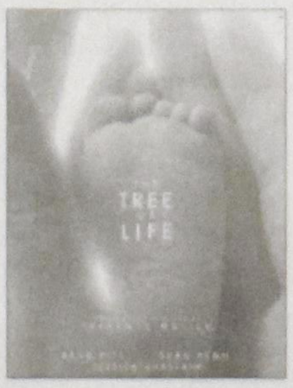
Greg Linell

There is a brief, quiet moment at the conclusion of director Terence Malick's amazing, wondrous and award-winning film that stands in stark contrast to what we have come to expect from the typical protagonist of the summer blockbuster. Jack O'Brien (played, as an adult, by Sean Penn) avoids the all-too-common culminating outburst of superhero violence and, instead, reacts to his epiphany, to the resolution of his quest, with just a smile. This is all the more remarkable because he has been struggling with some of the most profound questions that a human being can ask. *What is faith? Who is God? How to reconcile faith in God with tragedy and evil?* That Malick is able to entertain such questions in just over two hours is remarkable; that he does so with substance, nuance and deep affect elevates his accomplishment to the status of cinematic masterpiece. This admittedly ambitious achievement takes the form of a complicated storyline, virtuoso acting, fluid cinematography, dazzling pictorial compositions, astute sound design, and the magnificent orchestral and choral accompaniment of Berlioz, Bach and Brahms (among many others). Like any masterpiece, the film requires work to fully appreciate but there is no doubt that it rewards the attentive viewer.

Distinct time periods are the structure upon which Malick fixes the rest of the elements that comprise the film. The adult Jack, an architect employed within the impressive steel and glass towers of a prestigious firm, has received a disturbing phone call from his father. We are not privy to the conversation between father and son – this elliptical, gap-filled style is prevalent throughout the film – but it has, apparently, been a catalyst for Jack's reverie. He wanders throughout the concrete anonymity of a modern city all the while remembering his childhood. Young, preadolescent Jack (newcomer Hunter McCracken) registers all of the experiences of small-town post-World War II Texan life, particularly as refracted through his father (Brad Pitt), mother (Jessica Chastain) and two younger brothers. A friend's drowning, his parent's marriage, the perplexities of his sexual awareness, the natural and human environments that engender play and imagination – all of these are portrayed with an uncanny precision that I have rarely seen in other films. This boy-coming-of-age story is framed by a later event, the news that one of Jack's brothers has died at 19 years of age – a death that has echoed throughout Jack's life, bringing a bittersweet dissonance to his memories. The most startling and dislocating time periods, however, are Malick's evocations of the creation and consummation of history, sequences that employ images of the natural world in both literal and symbolic ways.

Set in 1950s, rural America, the film poetically leads viewers through the present day and the beginning and end of creation.

What's Malick up to here? The beginning of an answer lies in recognizing that the work of remembrance is rarely orderly, particularly when it involves those crucial periods in our lives that have become formative for the persons that we are now. Jack's boyhood experiences have defined him in ways that he is beginning to understand and, like many of us, his reflections cause him to wonder at what it all means. Memories jostle in Jack's mind and he finds a way to order them by reference to the Christian faith in which he grew up. Indeed, throughout the film, Jack's whispered voice-overs testify to the enduring appeal of the Psalms and various New Testament passages for articulating the deep feelings that are troubling him. For Jack it appears as if there are two ways through life, ways that are also evident in the natural world and throughout all of time. The way of Nature is to please oneself, to acquire, and to control whereas the way of Grace is that of humility, mercy and love. Thus, Jack understands his father to exhibit Nature and his mother to demonstrate Grace (of course, it's not as clear as the typology suggests for Jack's father has a deep appreciation for Bach and seems all too aware of his shortcomings as a father and husband). Nature and Grace are also at work in the creation and evolution of cosmos wherein destruction and new life co-exist. The aggression and predations of Nature, however, are no match for Grace and the film concludes with imagery and music that evokes the consummation (e.g., open graves, a gathering on the seashore, a bridge to a new city). In other words, Malick seems to suggest that Jack finds the reconciliation and hope that he is looking for in believing the biblical promise so compellingly testified to in Revelation. Thus, Jack's smile.



The Tree of Life
written and directed by Terrence Malick. Fox Searchlight, Limited Release.

Greg Linnell (glinnell@hotmail.com) lives in Kitchener, Ontario, where he attends Community CRC.

Features

Christian Courier is delighted to announce the winners of our Second Annual Adult Short Story Contest. The finalists were judged by Angela Reitsma Bick, editor, Nick Schuurman, review editor, and Cathy Smith, features editor. We congratulate Arien Vlaar, our first place winner, who will receive $100 for his story *Ghaaliya.* Arien's story is cohesive and suspenseful, embedded with a generous effort to understand another culture and point of view. The description is natural and effective, the characters are sympathetically rendered and the plot is believable.

STEVE MCCURRY

Ghaaliya

(pronunciation:"hal..eye..ah")

Arien Vlaar

Her drawing changed everything.

The mu'adhin's *Allahu Akbar* still ringing in her ears and hastily swallowing the last of her *naan,* Ghaaliya ran out to play in the muddy, rocket-ravaged street. Recent rains still filled the craters left in the aftermath of the last visitation by the *death angels*, as her father sarcastically called the Blackhawk gunships that came unleashing their grim-reaper rockets upon Dowkar, her beloved village. More frightening to Ghaaliya than the dreadful noise of their exploding rockets was the deafening vacuum of silence after their departure… a silence inexorably filled with the despairing wailing of women and the plaintive cries of children. Ghaaliya had once boldly asked her father Jaabir why other people were trying to hurt them and destroy their homes. Jaabir, his eyes burning like coals, looked at his only daughter and replied in a voice born of ice, "Allah will repay…praise be to Allah." Ghaaliya did not hear Jaabir mutter under his breath, Allah is taking too long….Jaabir must repay.

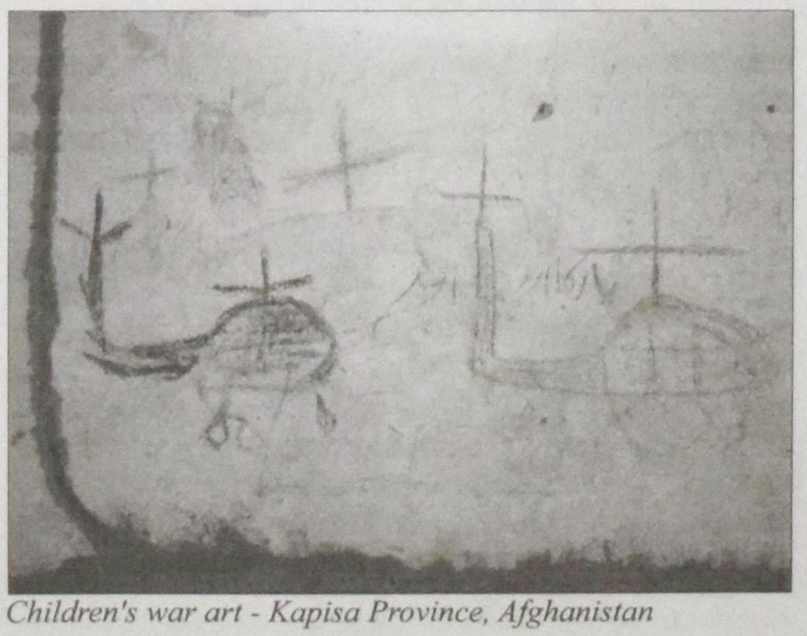
That had been after Samir, her beautiful brother, had gone to be with the Virgins. That is what her cousin Afshan, who was thirteen, had said. "Where *are* the Virgins?" Ghaaliya had asked Afshan. "*When* will they send Samir home?" "*Why* would he go to be with the Virgins when he could be with me?" Afshan had stared at Ghaaliya as if she had fallen off a donkey onto her head, but then turned quickly away. Ghaaliya had waited patiently. "Afshan" she asked, her voice soft with innocence, "Please, *tell* me." Afshan, who had believed she would one day marry Samir, and unable to truth-tell her cousin of his sacrifice, had run into the goat pen, burying her face in the coarse mane of Shameen, her pet goat. Ignoring Shameen's bleats of indignation, Afshan had hugged her even more fiercely, weeping bitterly.

Ghaaliya's mother Parand had been no help at all. After Afshan had refused to answer and had inexplicably run from her to Shameen, Ghaaliya had sought her out. Diverting her mother's attention away from the earthen oven had been no easy task for Ghaaliya, but finally, exasperation staining her voice, Parand had turned to her daughter, wiping her hands on her *panjabbi*. "What, my child?" Impatience surely, but other subtle and not easily defined notes flowed at the edges of her words. Pregnant with the unbearable, Parand's spirit laboured with a sorrow so heavy it was as if it had been conceived in the womb of the faraway mountains, their ancient weight pressing her heart from every side.

"The Virgins," Ghaaliya cried. "Tell me *where* to find them!" Ghaaliya's voice cracked with frustration and childish impatience. "I must go there and bring Samir back. I need him *much* more than they do." Ghaaliya tugged anxiously on her mother's arm. "Tell me at once and *I* will go to bring Samir home." Kneeling down, Parand grasped her daughter gently by the shoulders and spoke the words Ghaaliya so desperately wanted to hear. "My child…fruit of my womb, tomorrow you will see your brother again." Unable to contain her surprise, Ghaaliya hugged her mother and then, like a desert whirlwind, spun from the room into the sun-lit courtyard, singing…her voice rising with the sheer joy of a granted wish. Alone once again, the dam breaking in her eyes, Parand turned to face the hellish heat of the open oven.

Ghaaliya has been summoned by her parents into their private chamber. Surprisingly, her uncle Jawid is there as well. Ghaaliya can remember no outsider ever having been in her parents' chamber before. Her father's eyes are dark pools of moonless night; her mother's watery and vacant. Uncle Jawid sits stoically on a stool in the darkened corner, his face unreadable in the shadows. Jaabir holds out the golden-buttoned vest: "For you, my child." Leaving his throat in a whisper, the words leave a terrible bitterness on his lips. Surprised, with thin arms extended, Ghaaliya rushes forward to receive this most unusual of gifts. Filled with wonder, she can barely grasp that in addition to the promise of seeing Samir again tomorrow, she is now to be given this…this most beautiful vest to welcome him home. Ghaaliya's heart and eyes overflow with thankfulness as Jaabir carefully settles the vest on to her small body.

The Nike swoosh intrigues her. It is a kestrel in flight… it is herself in flight. She imagines the weightless caress of the clouds on her cheek…the kiss of their treasured rain on her lips as she wings high above her village… so high, in fact, that the broken houses and decapitated mosque are invisible to her. Startlingly blue, the "Just Do It" mantra proclaims its challenge from a sea of red. Fingering the golden buttons, Ghaaliya grins with childlike pleasure at her good fortune.



Children's war art - Kapisa Province, Afghanistan

Ghaaliya's drawing, undertaken in a doldrum of melancholy was profound in its simplicity. Unforgiving, it unveiled her village, where, though a black noonday sun beat mercilessly overhead, the entire village lay in shadow. Some houses seemed intact… others lay in waste, their walls and roofs lying askew. Villagers, hands raised in supplication, screamed their timeless *why* into the viewer's eye. What was missing from her drawing… from her people…were their eyes. Sightless, their faces reflected the hopelessness Ghaaliya sensed in her parents at the random destruction of Dowkar. Void of colour… of life…the drawing exuded a profound, post-apocalyptic despair. Parand, on seeing her daughter's drawing, had wept silently. His face a landscape of storm clouds, Jaabir had taken the drawing to the *madrass.* There it had been displayed prominently, raising quiet whispers and cautious questions. On the eighth day after it was first displayed, a private meeting with Jaabir and Jawid had been requested by the leader of the local Taliban, Siamak. Neither Parand nor Ghaaliya were invited.

It is heavier than Ghaaliya has expected. The surprising weight encourages her shoulders to slump, yet with childlike pride, she holds them straight and firm. Kneeling before her, Jaabir adjusts the vest, checking the fit, the buttons…especially the buttons, all the while avoiding his daughter's eyes. The "fitting" seems to take forever. "Let me go and show Afshan," Ghaaliya shouts, laughing with joy. Turning, she begins to run towards the outer room.

"STOP!" Her father's panicked voice freezes Ghaaliya in her tracks. Confused, she searches out her mother whose eyes are as wide as saucers and whose hands have fled to her mouth, suppressing a scream. Glancing to Jawid in the shadows, she notices, without comprehension, her uncle's face drawn in a rictus of fear. Meekly, and with a sheepish grin, she returns. Jaabir gingerly removes the vest from Ghaaliya's shoulders and, after carefully folding it, places it gently into the wooden box it had been taken from. "Tomorrow, my child…tomorrow." Jaabir speaks softly to her while his eyes search out Parand. She refuses to meet them. Ghaaliya does not notice. "Now, to bed, my child," her father intones, the choking note of despair in his voice lost to her. Later, she hears much whispering and what she thinks is her mother weeping, but then she drifts off to sleep. She dreams of flying on a giant yellow bird with startlingly blue wings whose golden eyes will find her brother, her beloved Samir.

Forward Operating Base Mojave is located 20 kilometers southwest of Dowkar. Its presence, a constant thorn in the side of the Taliban, has been restricting their operations in the valley and nearby hills for some time. While some success has been attained with IED's over the last 18 months…four Americans killed, sixteen injured…much more needs to be done if the infidels are to be driven to abandon the valley. Siamak, the local

See ***Ghaaliya*** *page 12*

Features

Our second place winner is Josh Bingham who will receive a subscription to *Christian Courier* for his story *At Amber's Grave, Weeping*. Josh's story, too, contains effective details that add to the atmosphere of the story, a believable protagonist who experiences the universal struggle of loss and grief, and a conclusion that is subtly foreshadowed within the plot. There were a number of other strong entries that we appreciated reading and may have opportunity to share in our pages in the future. – *Cathy Smith, features editor.*

At Amber's grave, weeping

Josh Bingham

The sun loomed low in the east and poured out its first rays onto the rural cemetery. Dew glittered among the grassy mounds and slid down like tears from the tombstones.

On his knees, Phil leaned forward and placed a bouquet of roses at one marble headstone, which still gleamed with newness. A cool breeze swept through, flapping the collar of his light jacket against one tear-streaked cheek and sending a host of leaves tumbling toward the east. They crunched and crackled as they skittered away.

Phil sniffled and rubbed his red eyes with one hand. He was only 41, but looked much older. His hair had thinned and turned white. Runnels of wrinkles coursed along his jaws, and forked at the corners of his eyes. Tall and skinny, he looked like a man who found little pleasure in food and drink.

He swiped the back of his hand across his nose and became aware of the scent of lilacs. Looking over, he saw the small tree in the distance, with its colorful display of flowers surprisingly still in bloom, a result of the unusually sunny and warm climate over the past six weeks. Amber had loved flowers; it helped Phil to know that she was resting in a place filled with beauty.

An old elm tree bowed its huge branches over Amber's grave, like a noble creature of mythology overspreading a treasure. Some leaves still hung on loosely, and rustled in the wind. Many nights during the summer, shortly after the car accident that had claimed Amber's life, Phil would lie in bed and take solace in imagining the music that the leaves would make when the wind blew across his daughter's grave. Perhaps even the moonlight would stream through the branches and serve as a spotlight of protection over his daughter. The activity gave him some comfort. Amber had always hated going to sleep in sheer silence. She'd always requested the TV or the radio in her bedroom be turned on, and her dad always obliged. The thought of his daughter reposing under the earth in a place that seemed to hang in an eternity of complete stillness pierced his heart. When this mood of despair struck him, it would send him into a fit of mournful wailing and heart-wrenched blubbering that made his head hot and stuffy. He remedied this by staggering through the dark bedroom and out into the kitchen, to open the fridge and pull out a cold beer, which he drank only in defiance to God. He would sit at the table and drink one after another until he passed out. It was his way of shaking his fist at God and announcing he found no happiness with the path his life had taken. Any notion of there being a happily-ever-after ending to his life appeared unlikely.

He actually hated the smell of beer; it stank of the athlete's foot he'd contracted during his high-school days as a runner. The drink didn't go down easily, either. The bitter taste coated his tongue and throat and turned his stomach into a roiling pit of bile. After bingeing, he would often feel light-headed and would run to the bathroom to lean over the toilet and upchuck, sometimes until he had dry heaves. He felt he could drop this practice at the appropriate time, since he found no enjoyment in it as true alcoholics did. Yet he saw no reason to, since it did help him get through the night. The beer companies would get his support as long as he felt that God withheld his.

Phil's vision locked onto the dates etched into the stone. They seemed to ring out the truth of life's brevity.

The dates now seemed to gloat about the limitations of time imposed upon his daughter. Not even 17 years. She had been cheated out of so many good experiences that should have come her way. Marriage, children, doing good for others. The world now had a void of which it didn't even seem aware. But Phil knew it. Would some man now live out a lonely existence because the woman he would have married now lay in a coffin? Or would he just find someone else and not even know that Amber ever lived? Perhaps he might even pass through this cemetery one day, walk by her grave, and not know she would have loved him immensely had she had the opportunity.

A dove began to coo in the distance. The bell of a country church about a quarter-mile down the road began to toll. Phil had passed it on the drive in. He never would have figured that they had church so early.

The sounds conjured up a memory of Amber when she was only seven. On a bright and sunny Sunday morning, Phil had been sitting in his favorite lawn-chair out back, sipping coffee and enjoying the cool breeze and silence. Amber had come running out the back door and over to her dad. She had on a blue dress with ruffled white tiers at the top and bottom. Smiling, she leaned over and kissed him on the cheek.

"I love you, Daddy," she said.

"I love you, Amber."

She tugged on his arm. "Let's go to church!"

"Not today," he said. "Your mother will take you."

Amber's smile dissolved into a look of puzzlement. A dove began to coo somewhere in the distance. "How come you don't want to go?" she asked. "Don't they tell you about Jesus in the grown-ups room like they do in Sunday school? If they don't, you can come with me!"

Phil laughed. "Don't you think I'd look kind of silly sitting in with a bunch of little kids?"

Amber paused to picture it, then laughed. "Yeah, I guess you would. But you still have to come and hear about Jesus. He's the best. He loves you and me very, very, very much." While she said this last part, she held open her arms to demonstrate the immensity of Jesus' love.

The dove's song seemed to increase, and Amber's eyes slanted as she listened closely.

"What kind of bird makes that sound?" she asked. "Is it an owl?"

"What sound?" Phil asked.

"Listen."

The dove cooed again. "That sound," she said.

"That's a dove," he said.

"Oh. That's pretty, but kind of sad."

Amber's mom leaned out the back door and hollered for her to come to church. It was one of the last times she would call for her daughter before running off to Missouri with a man she met on the Internet.

Phil leaned over and kissed Amber's forehead. "I'll go another time, sweetie. You go on and have fun."

Amber's disappointment was visible. She dropped her head and moved slowly away from her dad. Not wanting her to think he was a lost cause, he called after her, "You go and learn more about Jesus now, and tell me about him when you get home."

Even after her mom left them both, Amber continued to go to church. At first, the bus came by to pick her up every Sunday morning and then dropped her off in the afternoon. But Phil, not wanting to look like a complete heel, began dropping her off and picking her up himself. She seemed a little happier with this process because she got to kiss him goodbye before running into the church and playing with her friends before class. Then, when he came back to pick her up, she would come bounding out of the church with kids' giggles and pleasant chatter echoing behind her, and a big smile on her face as she clutched some lesson pages to her chest and made her way to the car. As they drove to a restaurant for lunch, Amber would talk excitedly about the goodness and perfect love of Jesus, while her dad just nodded and said, "That's nice, dear."

Her admiration and love for Jesus continued into her teen years. Other girls from her youth group would come over often, and it bamboozled Phil how polite and respectful they were. It just wasn't normal. Normal teenage girls avoided any and all dialogue with adults. They might mumble a "Hi," or a clumsy "What's up?" in passing. After all, some unwritten code of conduct necessitated that a teen had to at least acknowledge the parents of his or her best friend. But these friends of Amber actually carried on conversations with him and often inquired about how he was doing. And when she and her friends were together, and weren't aware he was listening, they talked about church, the Bible, Jesus, church events, and church music. And they did so with enjoyment! Phil began to suspect his daughter was in some sort of cult.

He certainly had never enjoyed going to church. As a boy, it had been sheer drudgery. His parents forced him to go. He often went into the car kicking and screaming. Literally. By the time they got to church, he resigned himself to a mood of "Okay-I'm-here-against-my-will-and-I'm-not-going-to-enjoy-it."

Amber had been on her way to pick up one of her friends for a Christian concert when the accident took place. She was driving on the interstate, through the heart of Dayton in the midst of rush-hour traffic, when, according to several witnesses, she wound up in a lane that was ending due to construction. With nothing but orange- and white-striped barrels and a cement barrier looming ahead, she sped up and tried to squeeze in front of a semi in the adjacent lane. The semi struck her car in the rear on the driver-side, sending the red Chevy Cavalier into a spin across four lanes of busy traffic. The car fishtailed as Amber frantically tried to gain control and finally collided head-on with another semi. Medics believed she died on impact.

"I'm sorry you died alone," Phil said softly, looking at Amber's full name carved so elegantly.

He wished he'd never let her start driving on the interstate. He thought back to the day when he'd taken her to the license bureau in the mall for her written exam

*See **Amber** page 12*

Ghaaliya...*continued from p. 10*

Taliban strongman, has received intelligence that the US Secretary of State will be making an unscheduled, unannounced visit to the base, ostensibly to boost troop morale. In conjunction with this visit and not one to miss a photo opportunity, the Secretary of State has requested to meet with some local children. Dowkar has been selected as the village from which those children will come, travelling to meet her at FOB Mojave. It has been arranged that at that meeting she is to present a gift of school material, collected and donated by Washington schoolchildren, to the local children. In exchange, the Dowkar children will present her with a small token of remembrance from them. To have this play well on CNN, the Secretary of State has requested the gift exchange be with a girl child, representing all of the children. On obtaining this intelligence, Siamak knows immediately what can and must be done. There is trading to be done here and Siamak knows that for Jaabir, the chance to revenge Samir's death will be sweet … even sweeter than a daughter.

Ghaaliya awakes to the sound of silence.

Parand has drowned in her tears during the dark watches of the night. Her heart is shuttered against the unrelenting storm of her husband's whispers and finally, his icy silence. In the cold pre-dawn, unable to say goodbye and terrifyingly alone, she abandons her bed, her home, her village.

Jaabir has packed the vest. He has checked and double-checked the receiver, hidden in the golden button, third from the top. He has replaced the battery. He has meticulously inspected the thread-like wires leading from the receiver to the detonator. He has triple-checked the camouflaged copper strand from the detonator to the explosive. The vest, pregnant with more than a kilogram of C4 wafers ingeniously sewn into the quilting, nestles gently into the padded wooden box. Jaabir's heart feels as if it may sink through the very soles of his feet. He will place the vest on Ghaaliya upon arrival at the American base. With the other children from the village, Ghaaliya will walk from outside the wire into the base and, on cue, to the Secretary of State to present her drawing. Young children, Siamak has assured him, will not be searched.

This was Ghaaliya's first trip away from Dowkar. The truck was noisy, the diesel exhaust filling her nostrils with its rancid, beastly stench. Her father sat hunched into the corner between the cab and the wooden side rail. The wooden box rested on his lap and Jaabir held it carefully, raising it gently as the truck broached yet another bump on the poor excuse for a road. Perhaps, Jaabir thought, Allah will be merciful and we will hit a roadside bomb. Perhaps the infidel woman will decide not to show up. The flotilla of helicopters whispering far to the southwest soon gave lie to his hope. Jaabir began to feel a shroud of absolute despair drape his soul as the truck journeyed ever closer to its destination. He glanced wonderingly at Ghaaliya who was happily trying to keep her balance by holding hands with a number of the other children and, as always, singing. Watching her, his gnarled hand drifted into his sleeve, finding the ever-present blade. Running his thumb along the killing edge and with a silent prayer, he decided.

Glancing up, Ghaaliya noticed a small motorcycle dustily keeping pace with them. Now that, she mused, would be real fun. Perhaps if he were at the base, she would ask him for a ride. Would her father let her? she wondered. Jaabir, too, watched as the motorcycle continued to shadow them, hoping against hope that the driver would hit a boulder or a pothole and be unable to continue. Mirwais spat out dust as he tried to keep a safe, but unobtrusive, distance from the truck. The transmitter was safely stowed in the left saddlebag, wrapped in bubble wrap Siamak had found in Kandahar on his last visit. He knew he would have to be careful when he got near the base and not approach to a distance that would raise any kind of alarm from the soldiers near the wire. Mirwais assumed that as long as he stayed an appropriate distance, the soldiers would simply assume he was a security escort for the truck and its precious cargo of children. He felt he could approach with impunity to within about 300 metres of the compound. The transmitter, simple as it was, had been tested to a range of 500 metres. He would hide in a pre-reconnoitered copse of stunted Russian-olive trees situated on the rise of a dune where their small, sea-spray leaves would give him adequate cover. From there Mirwais would have a clear view to the formal area of the compound, the area in which he was sure the exchange would take place.

Ghaaliya leaps from the truck with the other children, proudly taking her place at the head of the forming procession. Two soldiers, their rifles at the ready, watch carefully as the children queue up. Unsmilingly, one of them gestures to Jaabir. Stepping forward, he carefully unrolls the drawing so that the soldiers can see it. Taking the small wooden box from the truck, he invites one of the soldiers to open it. Hastily declining and backing away, the soldier indicates Jaabir should open it. He shrugs nonchalantly and does so, withdrawing the vest and letting it unfold so that the "Just Do It" faces the soldiers. Seeing the Nike trademark slogan, both soldiers smile knowingly. Jaabir indicates he wants to give the vest to Ghaaliya. Damon, the taller of the two, nods his approval and Jaabir kneels in front of his daughter. Like last evening, Ghaaliya holds out her small, dust-covered arms. Her bright smile betrays her utter happiness as she takes her drawing from her father...secure in the knowledge that soon she will be reunited with Samir. Holding her drawing tightly, she leads the other children and follows the soldiers. Just before passing through the gate and into the compound, Ghaaliya turns and bestows a heartbreaking smile upon her father.

Outside the village gate later that evening Jaabir waited, the wooden box balanced carefully on his knees. Inside *Just Do It* rested heavily and patiently nested. Missing was the third button, the one he had, with a razored sleight-of hand and in full view of the US soldiers, removed from Ghaaliya's vest. His eleventh-hour betrayal would, he had known, never be forgiven. In the dark hollow of the night they came for him, as he knew they would. Wordlessly, the taller one took the box from Jaabir who, at the encouraging prod of the Kalisnikov, led them into an even greater darkness.

Watching Feda, her three-year old daughter drawing pictures in the shaded sand of the courtyard, Ghaaliya becomes, as so often happens, suddenly conscious of the golden, orphaned button, lying softly between her breasts...the one her father Jaabir had given her before he disappeared. Her heart smiles, the Allahu Akbar whispering itself unbidden to her lips. "Come," she calls happily to Feda. "Let us go and feed the goats."

Arien Vlaar, 67, lives in St. Catharines and is a member of Jubilee Fellowship CRC. He is married to Sally and has three daughters and seven grandchildren. Arien is semi-retired from the construction industry. An avid reader, he also "dabbles" in writing poetry and fiction. The story of Ghaaliya, *which was born of a dream, is his first published short story.*

Amber...*continued from p. 11*

and subsequent driving test. After learning she'd passed the written portion, she'd hopped up and down in front of the desk, something she also did at Christian concerts, smiling and overflowing with joy. Joyful seemed to be Amber's usual disposition.

Phil recalled walking through the mall with her out to the rear parking lot, where she would pass the skills testing and the on-road test easily. If he'd known then that driving would cut her life drastically short, he never would have let her get her license.

If I could, he thought, *I would go back and stay in that mall with her forever.*

A cool breeze brushed his face. Amber had loved cool autumn days like this one. Still not too far removed from summer, fall was when Amber felt most alive. School had been back in session for over a month, and Halloween fun awaited with all of her friends, even the new ones she'd made in her new classes. There would be some new guy she was dating and crazy over who would dominate a large amount of her free time. Yet, Amber also enjoyed staying at home on cool autumn nights, covered with a blanket as she stretched out on the couch and watched a movie on TV. She loved the roar of the furnace as it fired up for the first time, finally kicking on and sending up a smell of dust and lint as it pushed heat up through the floor-vents. Phil wished now that he could stay with her forever out here, wrapping her in a blanket and keeping her warm and safe from winter to winter. He didn't want her to be alone. He felt so alone without her.

The sound of leaves crunching under slow, steady footsteps alarmed him. He got up into a crouching position and looked over his shoulder. A tall and husky African-American man was lumbering toward him. He wore baggy coveralls with a white shirt underneath. Short tufts of gray hair skirted around a bald pate. His smile gave away that his reason for approaching Phil was peaceable. Phil was skeptical of what he wanted, and didn't really want to be bothered.

"Hi," Phil said.

He forced himself to sound friendly as he squinted at the man, who stopped right before reaching the edge of Amber's grave.

"Hello," he replied, with a slight hint of a Southern accent. His smile hadn't effaced, and Phil felt that it should have.

Phil nodded and turned away, hoping the man would go do whatever he'd come to do. The man didn't budge. Phil sensed his eyes boring a hole into his back. He turned around. "Can I help you with anything?"

Still beaming, the man went over to Phil and put a firm hand on his shoulder. Phil eyed it defensively.

"I think I can help you," the man said. His big booming voice seemed unfitting for such a quiet, peaceful place.

Phil opened his mouth to protest that the man didn't even know him and what he'd gone through, and that there was no way he could help him. But the man began speaking again, very loudly.

"She was a precious child, your daughter. Always cheerful and happy. She had great respect and admiration

Columns

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

'Unless the Lord builds the house. . .'

"Train up a child in the way he [or she] should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it."

The nature of that "way" is clear to Bible readers. And it was that admonition and promise from Proverbs 22:6, King James Version, that was the reason for, and foundation of, the biblical wisdom my parents imparted to my siblings and me when we were in their care; it grounded the Christian education that they and other Reformed parents in my community insisted their children have.

My parents had a very modest income and five children. Yet the question of considering public education because they couldn't afford Christian school tuition never came up. Good, godly parents simply gave their children love, shelter, clothing, food – and a Christian education. Period. The Christian education was part of the love, and it was considered as necessary and fundamental as breathing.

I was young when I first asked about why we went to different schools than our neighbor-playmates did. I was young, too, when I realized that, unlike many other Christians, Christian Reformed Church members took Christian education very seriously. My eldest sister married a member of the Reformed Church in America, a church that wasn't so serious about Christian education. I saw my parents' concern that their son-in-law was not committed to sending any future children to Christian schools. It was a small mercy to them, perhaps, that they were no longer around to see their first three grandchildren attend public schools.

Commendable 'zealotry'

I got thinking about my own years in Christian schools and colleges since I first heard that Beacon Christian High School in St. Catharines had closed (*CC,* July 11). I'm not easily shocked these days, but that shocked me.

I lived in St. Catharines for many years among its large community of staunchly Reformed Dutch immigrants and their children. I saw their zealous commitment to Christian education. It was zealotry of the best possible kind. I saw it firsthand: I taught at Beacon. I saw it even before I was hired, when it was both terrifying and exhilarating. My job interview took place around two large, conjoined tables in an upper room at the school: a *dozen* board members, teachers and two principals – and me, then an introverted, not very self-confident young woman visiting a foreign country. They asked numerous questions about the nature of my "Kingdom vision" and about how I saw my faith intersecting with my life and teaching.

The school building was rather new when I came there in January 1975. The motto of its founders, etched in its cornerstone, was "Unless the Lord builds the house, its

builders labour in vain" (Ps. 127: 1). I saw that as a biblical corollary to the Proverbs verse that had motivated my parents and the Reformed community I was born into, 500 miles away across a national border.

I'm still wondering what happened, or is happening, in St. Catharines. I realize that a few former Beacon students are attending other Christian schools. But what of the rest? If the parents of those students are less committed to Christian education than their own parents were, they wouldn't be the only ones. It's happening elsewhere. But *why*? It's ironic that as public schools are getting ever more secular and "politically correct," more Christian parents are concluding that it's OK to give their children that kind of education. Has money become an issue, along with Christian schools' fewer course choices and smaller, less spiffy facilities? Do people not realize that one thoroughly, biblically Christian course, in any subject, that gets students to understand secular worldviews versus the mind of Christ is worth whole handfuls of public school courses, and will continue to form students long after they take such a course?

I can't judge from afar and don't know what's in people's hearts. But God knows our hearts. And he always blesses, in one way or another, sacrifice for Christ's sake.

One other thing. I had grade school teachers who assigned us parts of the Bible to memorize. (That was reinforced in Sunday school and catechism.) We learned by heart key verses and passage from both Testaments. I learned Luke 2, a chunk of Romans 8, Psalms 23, 100 and much of 103, to name just a few.

It was never onerous; quite the contrary. And almost every day still, when I read the Bible I'll run across something I memorized in school. When I now read those parts of Scripture they resonate profoundly in my mind and spirit, more so than most other parts of the Bible. That is just one of numerous ways that my Christian education was a true "gift that keeps on giving."

A good Christian education is always such a gift.

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC *editor living in Youngstown, New York.*

Amber...*continued from p. 12*

for you, Phil."

Phil stood up, his face filled with confusion. "You knew Amber?"

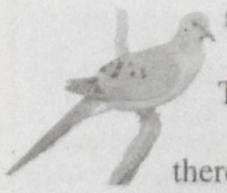
The man chuckled. His eyes flashed with a pureness that Phil had often seen in Amber's eyes. "I know the Lord that she and I both serve. If a person truly knows Jesus, it shows in how they live. Amber was a real believer, wasn't she?"

Phil swallowed and nodded. Somewhere, the song of the dove rose again.

The man rubbed his chin. "Such a pretty sound, and yet tragic."

Phil tensed as the exact description his daughter had given of the dove's sound was repeated. Who was this guy?

"All will suffer hurt in this fallen world," the man said.



He grew solemn for only a moment. Then he smiled and pointed to the east.

"There's a City coming. Amber's already there, waiting. You'll want to be there, too. It's a place where there's no more night, no more weepin', no more sorrow, no more sinnin', no more death." The man's smile seemed to intensify. He nodded, saying, "Oh, yes, you're gonna want to be there. And the only way in is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."

"Are you from the church?" Phil motioned with his head toward the direction of the church. A suspicion that the church had ties with the one Amber had attended developed; it certainly would have explained how the man knew who he was.

The man laughed. "Nah. I'm just a stranger here to tell you the good news of my Master. He loves you, Phil. He lived the perfect life you couldn't, and he took the punishment that you should have gotten unto himself, so you could be innocent on the Day of God's judgment. Will you let Jesus into your heart?"

Phil's mind reeled. The man's words seemed to sink into his soul and resonate with truth. This now seemed like a God-appointed meeting. He dropped to his knees.

"Yes, I want Jesus."

"Then you'll pray with me?"

Phil nodded. The man got down on his knees slowly, gripped Phil's hands together, and they bowed their heads.

"Lord Jesus," the man began, "thank you for putting Phil in our path today. Please accept his prayer of forgiveness."

There was a moment of silence as Phil quieted his heart. He then found his mouth opening.

"Lord Jesus, I'm sorry I sinned against you. Thank you for dying on the cross for me. Please come into my heart. Be my Lord and Savior."

"Amen," the man said loudly, and then rose up fast and shouted. Phil looked up, a smile having crept onto his own face. Excitement shot through him as he realized he'd done something he should have done long ago: put his faith and trust in the One who loved him more than anyone.

The man's voice grew extremely loud and he brought his hands together with a gusty clap: "There's joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. Your Amber and the others are getting ready to throw you a big party!"

Phil grinned as he imagined Amber's reaction to the news that her dad had been born again.

The man clapped Phil's shoulder and then began to walk toward the east.

"Where are you going?" Phil asked.

The man threw a glance over his shoulder just long enough to say, "Home," and kept on walking.

"Will I see you again?" Phil shouted.

The man didn't turn around, but shouted, *"You better believe it!"*

The church bells tolled again, and Phil turned toward the sound, expecting just about anything on this special day. He turned back to look at the man, wondering who he was and where he lived. His mouth opened in surprise. The sunlight shafted through the tree branches onto a cemetery whose only current visitor was Phil himself.

Josh Bingham, 33, lives in Piqua, Ohio. He has enjoyed writing fiction since he was a teenager, and has published several stories in small-press magazines, including Outer Darkness, The Ultimate Unknown *and* Weird Times. *Josh is a newlywed who works in healthcare, and is currently also putting the finishing touches on his book,* Scary Stories for After Dark. *He enjoys baseball and contemporary Christian music.*

Columns

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith

Passing the peace on the street

Today a handsome, 21 year old guy hugged me on the street. Not something that happens every day, mind you.

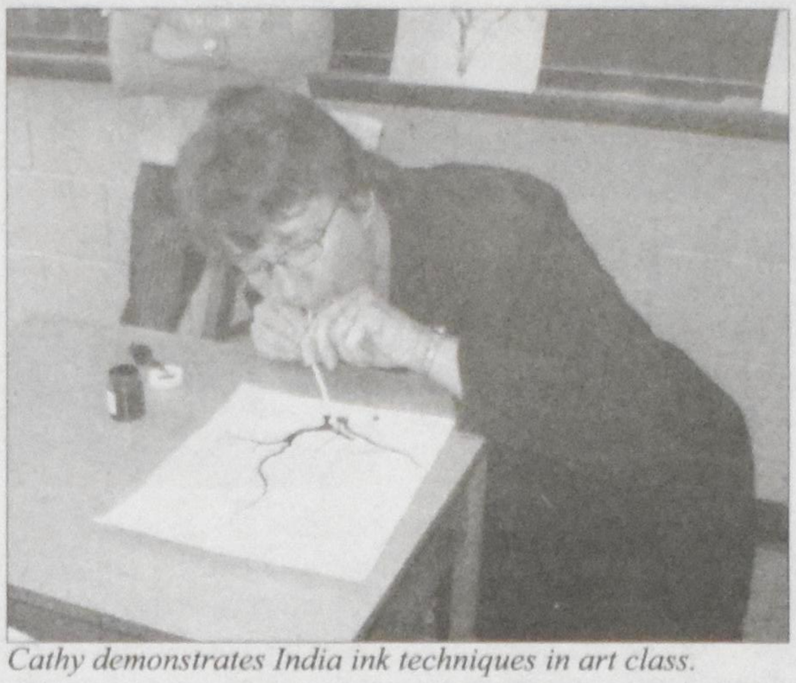
I went for a walk after supper. Headphones on, head down, watching the sidewalk because I invariably trip when I get moving too fast for my varicose veins to keep up. I almost ran into the guy on the bike with his dog on a leash. He smiled at me and I knew who he was . . . a former student I hadn't seen in years.

He grinned at me. "Hi, Mrs. Smith. How are ya?" I gave him a wide smile, genuinely pleased to see him. Dustin*. So many memories.

He'd been a handful in my classroom, to put it tactfully. Athletic, charismatic. The girls all liked him. A wiseacre and not above bullying others. Back then I walked a tightrope with him, trying to keep him focused on achievement, when he could have everything he wanted based on good looks and charm. But he had potential as a student, and, deep down, he was a sensitive and gifted artist. He could draw. He could envision a project and execute it perfectly. He had imagination and patience. In art class, a different student emerged, focused and self-motivated. I could praise him without reservation for his originality and effort. And I did. I entered his work in some student exhibitions. I asked if I could keep some of his pieces for future displays and workshops. I still have some of them.

Dustin had his reasons for volatility. A few years later, his parents went through a bitter divorce. His life became overshadowed by conflict. Eventually, he left town.

So it was a surprise to see him on the main street. I asked him how he was doing. He told me that he was excited because he had been accepted into an apprenticeship program. He was only in town temporarily, and would be moving again soon. Didn't see much of his younger brother anymore.



Cathy demonstrates India ink techniques in art class.

He asked me what I was doing. I told him I was retired. Walking to lose weight and stay fit. He told me that he had lost forty pounds. He had gotten "really huge" for a while, but that it felt good to be back at a normal weight. One of the reasons he goes biking every day. He told me I looked good. Ever the charmer.

I asked him if he was doing any art. Not much, he replied, but he still had a sketch pad. Keep it up, I told him. You know you've got it. It'll be there when you have time to work on it again. I told him I still had some of his work in my files.

Was he seeing anyone? I asked. Yeah, he was seeing a girl, but taking it slow. That's good, I said. You probably know better than most, how important that is.

A bit more small talk. He straightened up and pulled his dog in. I wished him well in his apprenticeship. I was about to say goodbye. He looked directly at me with a frank and honest gaze, spread open his arms, and invited a hug. So I hugged him. Then I gave him a light punch on his shoulder and said, "If you're ever talking to your brother, tell him hello from me. And, hey, I'll pray for you guys." And, as I walked on, I did.

Because I think I know what that hug was about. It was "thanks." Thanks for putting up with my shenanigans and liking me even though I was a disturber in your class. Thanks for recognizing that I was good at something beyond the crash and dash of male puberty. Thanks for not judging me based on what happened in my family. Thanks for remembering me a decade or more later and smiling at me like you still care.

I hope he had a sense of what the hug was about from my side: Yes, I still care. Just doing my best to pay it forward because, once upon a time, I was rather a disturber myself. Just passing on the peace of Christ.

** This story was shared with permission, and Dustin's name has been changed.*

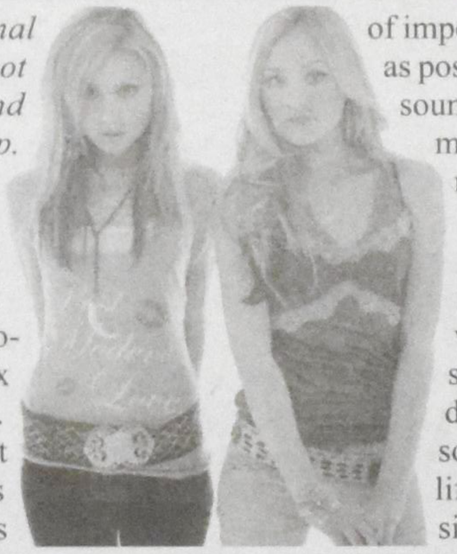
Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is features editor of CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ontario.

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

When relationships become unmanageable

Many of us take our emotional health for granted, until we cannot seem to solve the usual ups and downs of an important relationship. When this happens, we may need to face a much deeper and complicated family problem.



Q. I am a 23-year-old woman and working towards a career in banking. Within the next six months I hope to move into my own apartment. Unfortunately, my 25-year old sister has her heart set on moving in with me. I, however, had plans of asking a close girlfriend to share the cost of this apartment. I have known her for ten years and have always enjoyed her company. My parents, on the other hand, want me to share the apartment with my sister because it will help her "grow up." I am reluctant to live with her since our relationship has been trying at best. I do not know what seems to be the problem between us, but I am always on my guard when I am around her. Furthermore, she has difficulty holding on to a job.

More specifically, my sister never accepts any responsibility for the scrapes and messes she gets herself into. Whatever happens in her life is always someone else's fault. If we get into a fix and I try to explain my point of view, not only does she twist and turn my words around, she blatantly denies what she has said and done. She is also impulsive and suffers from moodiness, irritability and anger. I often feel she is trying to manipulate me and I know she has lied to me on various occasions. I call my relationship with her "crazy- making," and so I don't discuss anything of importance with her anymore. As much as possible I live my own life. I know this sounds bizarre, but I cannot have a normal relationship with her and so, I do not want to have her as a roommate.

A. I understand your reluctance to have your older sibling move in with you under the above circumstances. It also seems that you have detached yourself from your sister so you can be in control of your own life. This too is understandable. Your sister, however, seems to have traits of a Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). Unfortunately, we do not have as much empathy for those who are afflicted with psychosocial disorders as we do for those who struggle with physical illnesses. So I will use an analogy. What would you do if your sister had a broken leg? You would make exceptions for what you expect of her, and you would settle for not being able to do all kinds of activities with her. Likewise, in this case, I suggest you learn as much as you can about this complex disorder so that you can continue to respond to her in healthy ways. It might not be easy for your sister (or your parents) to accept that she may have a brain disorder, which is caused by biological as well as environmental influences. In all likelihood, she will vigorously deny it. I would also suggest, therefore, that you have a talk with your parents and ask them to become involved – rather than yourself – in helping their daughter find a good physician who could recommend an experienced professional in this field for diagnosis and possible treatment. At the same time, it sounds like you are on a helpful path in terms of your own life. But I want to stress that your sister needs empathy and understanding, since she is probably experiencing deep-seated feelings of incompetency and shame. You may want to read and work through *The Stop Walking on Eggshells Workbook* by Randi Kreger and James Paul Shirley. It's been created especially for those walking alongside someone who has a Borderline Personality Disorder. And so, rather than living with her, the more you can educate yourself in terms of your sister's challenges, the more you will be able to role- model healthy behaviours. This can be immensely helpful to her as she tries to find her place in God's world.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.

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Columns

Our World Today

Bert Hielema

From here to eternity

I have some bad habits – I'll name one later – and some good ones, such as biking or running an average of 10 km every week day. I've also, for the last 26 years, written a daily meditation of some 400 words from Monday through Saturday and 800 on Sundays, based on texts from the lectionary, the list of preselected bible readings. Each fall I buy two copies (my wife does it too) of *Journeying through the Days,* published by the Upper Room Books in Nashville. These volumes are beautifully illustrated, each page divided into two open sections, headed by a Bible text, while Sundays occupy a full empty page except for the text and the lectionary readings for the ensuing week. That custom, more than anything else in my life, has influenced my thinking.

A few weeks ago my meditation was centred on Psalm 139, our wedding psalm 58 years ago, and specifically its last words: "Lead me in the way everlasting." I can't remember what these words meant to me in 1953, but now I see it as a prayer to direct me on the road to the new creation. A few days prior to that, the journal had called my attention to Romans 8, asking me to share in God's suffering if I want to share in his glory.

I see a definite connection between suffering and the road from here to eternity. We all know John 3:16, "God so loved the world," which is the very basis of Christianity. By loving living nature we express our love for all our neighbours, whether human, plant, air or water. When we pollute, we harm these all.

Suppose that Rembrandt, after having sold his most famous creation, the *Nachtwacht,* depicting the elite of Amsterdam during the Dutch Golden Age, discovered that the new owner removed some faces and deformed others, grossly mutilating the entire piece. That would have been a source of great aggravation for Rembrandt van Rijn.

We daily do this to creation, causing immense suffering to Jesus. Because I love Jesus, I, on my journey to eternity – which I believe to be the new creation – suffer with Jesus because I live in a society where I am forced to harm creation. I suffer additional pain because of the failure of the church, at least the one I attend, to recognize the pain of creation. Yet we all know that the cosmos Jesus so loves so much is now groaning, as in pains of childbirth (Rom. 8:22).

In the midst of suffering

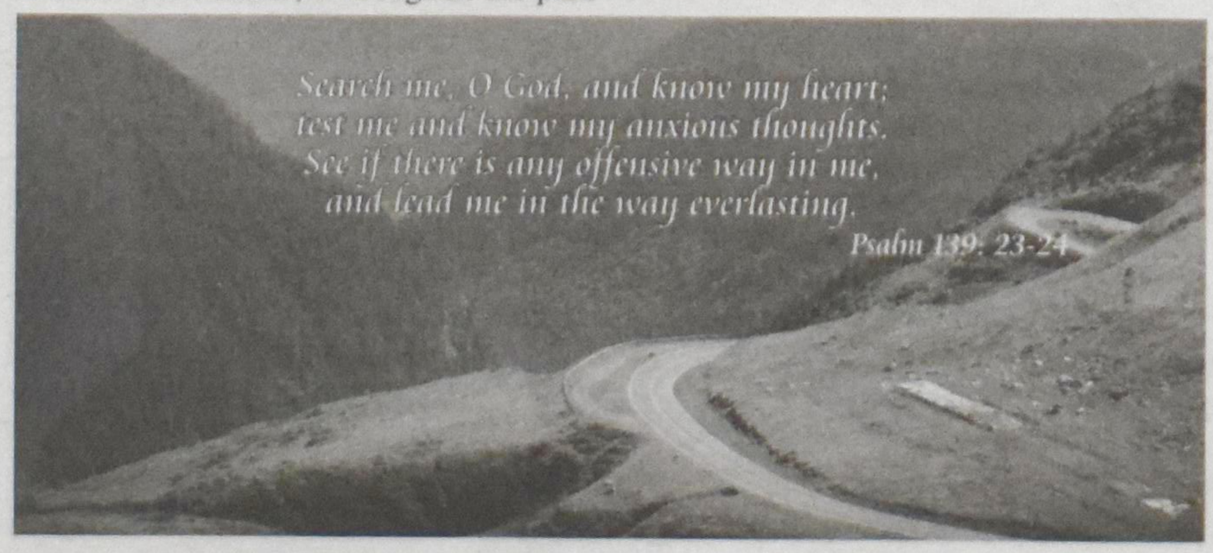
In that regard Christianity is not different from Islam. A friend sent me an article from the *Jakarta Post*, dealing with [Islamic] preachers and the environment. Here is a quote: "However, not only do most preachers undermine life in this world – which is indeed temporary – compared to the eternal world after life, they also ridicule science, logic and reason. On the pulpits, many preachers challenge scientific discoveries, which, according to their belief, are untenable. They then call upon the audience to return to 'piety' and religious dogma. They stressed that human reasoning can never surpass religion."

And this brings me to American politics, a nation where the word "God" is (ab)used more than anywhere else in the world. I find it utterly depressing when, to name one example, Sarah Palin, riding on a motorcycle, exclaimed triumphantly that she "loved the emissions," and advocates "drill baby, drill." Michelle Bachmann, another presidential hopeful, is a Rushdoony disciple, and expressed agreement with him when he said that God in his law requires the death penalty for homosexuals. R.J. Rushdoony, a so-called Reconstructionist theologian, believed that the Mosaic laws must be implemented today, a statement resonating in the U.S. Tea Party movement. Whenever I see the Pope or the High Anglican clergy in their full regalia I see Aaron and the temple, and the Old Testament rules and regulations, and I cringe.

In our world today Jesus is the forgotten item. The New Testament and freedom that is in Christ is pushed away, leaving a vengeful God rather than an understanding Jesus.

We are all, without exception, on the way from here to eternity. Only when we suffer because of climate stress, misguided politicians, people-pleasing preachers and reality denying consumers can we be fully assured that the crown of glory awaits us (Rom. 8:17).

One of Bert Hielema's bad habits is that he preaches too much in his columns. Complaints to bert@hielema.ca.


Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.
Psalm 139: 23-24

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin

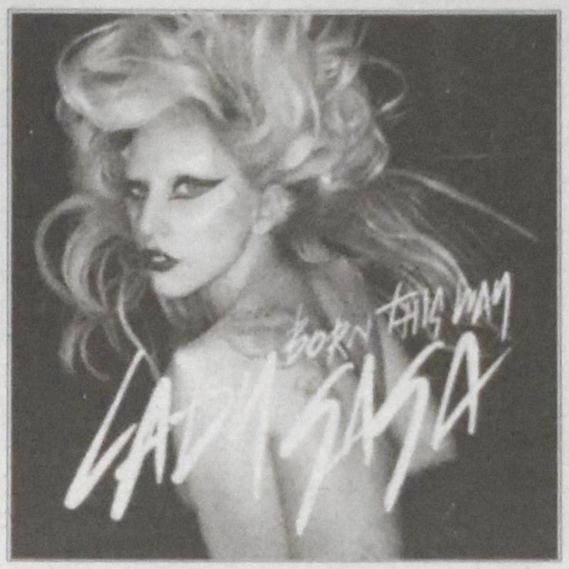
Born this way?

Lady Gaga's image appears front and centre on the cover of the *Metro* newspaper. Flashbacks to Madonna come to mind. Who is Lady Gaga? The article gives snippets of her life. In regards to her album, "Born This Way," she states that she struggles "to understand how I can exist as myself, as someone who lives halfway between fantasy and reality all the time." This describes very well the 25-year-old who continues to portray a very peculiar image of herself to the media and to her "little monsters," her fans. Lady Gaga saw a void in the whole area of sensationalism and has used that to gain momentum. This is not new. Each generation needs or longs for a new sensationalist who grabs their attention and does things that bend and twist the norm. I believe we are all born with an innate void that needs to be filled. Theologically speaking, we are born into sin. We have a predisposition to be rebellious in nature and live to please ourselves rather than submit our human nature to God.

I believe we all need to come to a place of understanding about being "born this way," not in the ways we define ourselves or allow others to define us, but to recognize the areas within us that long for acceptance, affirmation, and love. We will, in our humanness, grapple with identity, self-worth, wholeness, acceptance and love for as long as we are on the earth. Lady Gaga says that her passion is social justice and music. If she would clear away the outfits, the make-up, the sexualized images and provocative statements, and just sang and worked on social justice issues, could she do it? Could she see a bigger picture of what and who she is in the world, rather than the Mother Monster image? My heart breaks for her; I see a young woman desperate for attention, longing to know what real love is even if she can't see it. As much as she is a sensationalist and a poor role model, my prayer is that she knows the incomparable love of her heavenly Father who calls her to something more, something greater than what she can imagine.

Made for better things

The Metro's May issue was focused on the "Born This Way" LGBTQ campaign. Throughout the paper, well-known gay and lesbian media representatives answered the question, "What advice would you give your 15-year old self, knowing now what you didn't know then?" Having struggled with my gender identity, I can now see a bigger picture of who I am and why I was created as a gendered being. I see my worth and identity wrapped up in my understanding of who I am as a



son of God. Fully loved, fully embraced and fully free to be the man God had from the beginning desired me to be. Here's what I would tell my 15-year-old self: Life gets better. It really does. You may not see it now, nor understand fully because of what you are struggling with and the ability to understand it fully may not happen for a while, but know that God created all things. He knew you before your parents even did, and he has a plan and a purpose for your life. He didn't create you gay, nor is he punishing you or causing this internal struggle with your gender. He does though, have a bigger plan for your life, one that will BLOW you away. Learn to trust him. Find safe people to talk to: ones who will walk with you and listen. They don't need to have all the answers, but they should walk you toward Christ. Be transparent. Be real. Don't hide your struggle or your questions but talk about it. There is no shame in struggling, there is no shame in who you are – unique, wonderful, amazingly talented, handsome, confident, a beautiful gift to those around you. You don't need to try to be like other men around you, the ones you think you should be like. Be who God made you to be. You are more than your struggle and you are *way* more than the world's labels. Don't seek out idols – don't let heterosexuality be your idol, don't let homosexuality be your idol, don't let the struggle be your idol. Worship the Lord. Worship him with abandon. He longs for you to come and bring everything to him. He will make the journey ahead full of joy, but remember as you seek holiness that happiness is different from joy. Holiness comes with a cost; it means sacrificing your life, laying it down at the foot of the cross daily. That's hard. It is a sifting and a refining and the Lord Jesus Christ who made the ultimate sacrifice is right there with you. He won't give you more than you can bear.

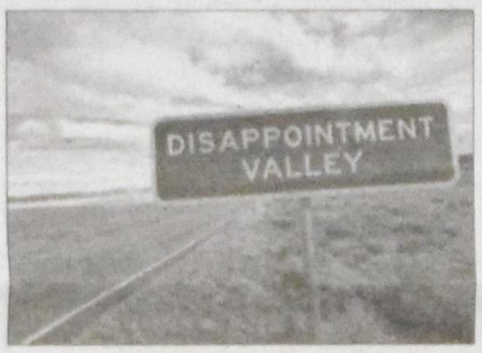
Kenny Warkentin (kennyp66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.

Lifelong learning

Rachel Boehm

Seminary: just the beginning

Many a young pastor leaves the seminary eager to pursue a life in ministry. Why, then, do so many face debilitating stress after just a few years of service, while others flee the profession before middle age? In a recent article in the *New York Times,* [1] Paul Vitello wrote, "Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen." The website **pastorburnout.com** notes that as many as 45 percent of pastors have experienced debilitating depression or burnout.



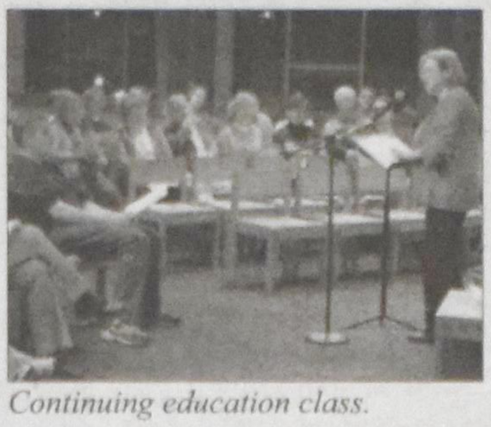
Teach them to keep on learning

Seminaries have taken note of these statistics and responded. "From the perspective of the seminary, the new curriculum is designed with lifelong learning in mind," says Rev. Kathy Smith, Director of Continuing Education for Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. "Instead of trying to teach students everything they need to know, we try to teach them that they will have to be responsible for their learning from here on out. The new curriculum isn't as much based on information as formation – teaching people how to keep on learning."

Smith compares the roles of pastor and family physician. "In addition to basic anatomy, you would want your medical doctor to know the latest practices and diagnoses and information," she says. "You should want that of your pastor, too. There are new ways of ministering in the church and understanding the church," says Smith.

Addressing barriers

Unfortunately, not all congregations support the learning needs of pastors. "Some churches don't value their pastor's need for continuing education," says Smith. "They may ask the pastor to use vacation to pursue learning opportunities." Smith notes that some denominations now require pastors to gain a certain number of continuing education credits each year to maintain their credentials, a system which encourages greater compliance across congregations. However, in the absence of denominational policies, a church's encouragement and tangible support can go a long way. "Making time and funds available for a pastor's learning is crucial," Smith says.



Continuing education class.

Asking a pastor to share his or her learning is also important. "It is reasonable for churches to expect pastors to give a report," says Smith. These accountability practices show the pastor that the congregation cares and is interested in his or her professional growth.

Smith advises pastors to inquire about a church's commitment to lifelong learning prior to accepting a call. "I advise students to ask the question, 'What will be provided in terms of time and funding for my ongoing learning?'" says Smith. For pastors already in the ministry, Smith recommends talking to church leaders or the pastor-church relations committee and asking them to advocate for funds – and time – to be set aside for continuing education. "A pastor's life is very busy, and there are a lot of demands," says Smith. "Carving out time for learning takes intentionality on both the part of the pastor and the church."

Smith advises pastors, with their church's support, to schedule time for learning and reading. "Make learning a regular practice," Smith says. "Schedule your learning time for the same day and time each week." Learning with others is another way pastors can support themselves in keeping their learning commitments. "Don't always go it alone," says Smith. "Pastors who learn with other pastors or with members of their congregations experience that their learning grows exponentially."

Finally, pastors can help churches understand the value of learning by communicating their discoveries with the congregation. "If you are a pastor who takes time for learning, share what you've learned," says Smith. "Write about it in a church newsletter, include references in your sermon or create an adult education class based on what you've learned."

Graduation: the end that marks the beginning

Seminary graduation, often viewed as the culmination of a pastor's studies, is really just the beginning. "Ideally, all pastors realize that no matter what training they get, they can't learn everything they need to know in seminary," says Smith. "Being a lifelong learner is going to make you a better pastor. Having a character of humility and inquisitiveness will make you a better preacher, pastoral caregiver and teacher. Ministry is not just about teaching, providing pastoral care or preaching. It really is about learning along with the congregation."

[1] *Taking a Break From the Lord's Work* by Paul Vitello, published August 1, 2010

Rachel Boehm is a communications specialist and a freelance writer. She lives near Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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Sid and Hilda Looyenga (nee **van Spronsen**)

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Home: 5 Brown's Crescent, Acton, ON, L7J 3A3
Email: shl@sympatico.ca

Chris and Willy Alberts (nee **Van Polanen**)

50th Anniversary, Calgary, Alberta
August 26, 1961-2011

Our parents taught us a love for and commitment to God, His Church, our families, our neighbours, God's creation, Christian education and our calling and vocation. We are thankful to God and congratulate you Mom and Dad.

With Love,
Erick & Sue Alberts, *Surrey B.C.*
(Kailee† 1995), Sydney, Calvin, MacKenzie
Jeff & Phyllis Alberts, *Barrie, ON*
Paul, Lenie
Christy & Joe Antoniuk, *Edmonton, AB*
Aidan, Kiara

Together, we all celebrated God's faithfulness in this journey, marked by grace, in July 2011.

Home address: 204 Sierra Morena Pl,
Calgary, AB T3H 2X3

Almelo, The Netherlands — 1961 — August 28 — Surrey, BC 2011

With joy and thanksgiving
we celebrate God's faithfulness in blessing our parents,

Henk and Helen (Willems) Verwoerd

With **50 Years of Marriage**.

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Opa and Oma!
Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways.
Psalm 128:1

With much love from your family,
Art & Shirley Verwoerd (Justin, Alisa, Derek), *Abbotsford, BC*
Yvonne & Edward VanderVelden (Adam, Eric), *Surrey, BC*
Ingrid & Bryan Fritsch (Kiera, Joshua, Kajsa, Emma), *Maple Ridge, BC*
Christine & Jason Versluis (Rebecca, Jillian), *Langley, BC*

Home address: 16673 Cherryhill Crescent,
Surrey BC V4N 1W2

With joy and thanksgiving to our Lord
for his enduring
faithfulness and blessing,
we celebrate the

50th Wedding Anniversary
of our parents and grandparents

Adrian and Jean Van Geest

on August 25, 2011

With much love,
Jim Van Geest, *Hamilton, ON*
Sally Van Geest, *Abbotsford, BC*
Fred & Susan Van Geest, *Minneapolis, MN*
Julia & Luke
Annette & James Groen, *Ottawa, ON*
Mitchel, Jason, Holden

Correspondence address:
77 Northernbreeze Street, Mount Hope ON L0R 1W0

Obituaries

Jan. 13, 1913 — Tzum,Friesland — **Repko Willem Popma** — July 17, 2011 — Toronto, Ont.

Our hearts are filled with sadness and joy. Sadness because our dear husband, dad and opa has been called home. Joy because he is with his Lord. We celebrate his life and treasure his deep love and commitment for Mom and his family. Dad and Mom were married for seventy-one years.

Repko was born into a minister's family. He had an early desire to serve the Lord through ministry. In 1940 he married Geziena Oosterveen and began his vocation as a minister (dominee) in the Gereformeerde churches of Vreeland and Nichtevecht.

Repko and Ini prepared for ministry in Surabaya, Indonesia in 1945 and served there from 1946 to 1956. The family immigrated to Canada where Repko led the Christian Reformed Church of Victoria, B.C. (Duncan for one year) from 1957 to 1964. He accepted a call to Trenton CRC in 1964 and remained there until retirement.

Upon retirement and until 2004, Repko and Ini served the churches in Classis Eastern Ontario through preaching, weddings, funerals and personal counsel to many. They became mentors to the pastors and their wives and provided hospitality for them at their riverside garden property in Plainfield. Their involvement in the community was extended to Telecare, Amnesty International and seniors at Parkside Village. He was fondly remembered for his strong pastoral skills.

Repko had an abiding faith and hope in God, confident in His faithful promises. At the end of each church service he would raise his hands and pass on a benediction that has resonated through the ages: "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May his face shine upon you and give you his peace." May we all receive and experience this blessing.

At the age of 91, Repko preached his final sermon in the Quinte area. They moved to Tollendale Retirement Village in Barrie. After four years they moved to Leaside Retirement Residence in Toronto. He was in excellent health until a week before his death.

He is missed by:
His wife Ini (Geziena) Oosterveen
His children:
Alice & Gary Brand — Harold & Kathy Popma — Violet Popma
Margriet & John Nieboer — Jackie & Peter Van Huizen — Carolien & Cam Murch
And his eleven grandchildren and sixteen great-grandchildren.

Funeral service was at First Christian Reformed Church in Toronto on August 4, 2011
Text: Psalm 27:13 and 14

Correspondence: Geziena Popma,
Apt 535 10 William Morgan Dr. Toronto ON M4H 1E7

Gerard Versluis

The Lord called home Gerard at Douglas Memorial Hospital on Friday July 29th, 2011 in his 90th year.

Dear devoted husband to Irene for 34 years.

Cherished father to John, Cora and Casey VandenBogert, Gary and Linda and Ron. Proud Opa of Brandon, Jordan, Tyler, Katelyn, Jennifer, Jessica and Rebekah. Also survived by brother John and Kitty, and sisters Pleuntje, Fijgje, Corry, and sister-in-law Rie of the Netherlands.

Predeceased by his first wife Truus Schermers (1951) and his second wife Jenneke Schermers (1972), his daughter Trudy (2005) and brother Klaas (1998).

Mr. Versluis was a partner in Versluis Brothers Construction and a dedicated member of Maranatha Christian Reformed Church as well as organist for many years. Gerard will always be remembered for his devotion to God and his kind and gentle spirit.

Correspondence: Versluis Family, 26 John St
St Catharines ON L2N 4P1

Reina (Irene) Versluis

The Lord in his mercy called home Irene at The St. Catharines General Hospital on Friday August 12 2001 in her 87th year.

Predeceased by her loving husband Gerard on July 29th 2011 after 34 years of marriage.

Caring step-mother to John, Casey and Cora VandenBogert, Gary and Linda and Ron. Proud Oma of Brandon, Jordan, Tyler, Katelyn, Jennifer, Jessica and Rebekah.

Predeceased by two sisters and one brother in the Netherlands. Will be lovingly remembered by nieces and nephews also in the Netherlands. Irene was a devoted member of Maranatha Christian Reformed Church.

Correspondence: Versluis Family, 26 John St
St Catharines ON L2N 4P1

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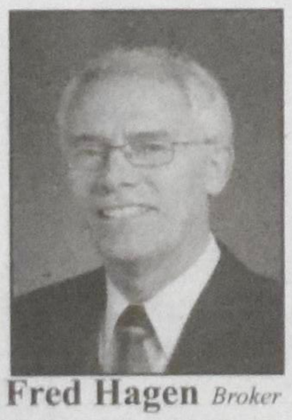

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Sep 25 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching. DVDs are available.

Oct 1 Netherlands Bazaar, Thornhill Community Centre, For information on the Bazaar, please contact 905-477-1243, 416-498-8706, 416-222-1677, 905-884-6939, website: **netherlandsbazaar.com**

Oct 15 Day of Encouragement. Hamilton District Christian High School, **Ancaster** For information, call: 905-336-0967 ext. 278 Information will soon be on our website: **diaconalministries.com**

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Should the "ethics" of oil take into account political as well as environmental factors?

Pipeline politics

Mike Wevers

EDMONTON, Alberta – Alberta's economic growth has led the nation in recent decades. The oil and gas industry has been the main driver, but Alberta's agricultural production, particularly its intensive livestock industry, has also contributed significantly to that growth. Much of Alberta's economic wealth is owing to its geological and geophysical endowment, given by providence. However, Alberta's economic development has been consistently hampered by a geographical limitation: it is landlocked.

Without water access, nations build railways to move product. But oil and gas production cannot be efficiently moved by rail. Where there is no ready access to ocean-going freighters, which transport – for example – Middle Eastern oil to the energy hungry world, the solution has been to build pipelines. Alberta recognized this early in its economic development strategy in the 1950s, creating legislation that enabled the collection and distribution of gas throughout the province by one company, Alberta Gas Trunk Line. At the same time, the federal government supported pipeline building by enabling the creation of TransCanada Pipeline to carry Alberta gas to eastern markets. These two major gas line systems, which have subsequently merged, and various oil pipelines, help get Alberta's oil and gas to consumers' furnaces, cars and trucks.

Looking south

Landlocked Alberta is again faced with the challenge of moving its increasing oilsands production to market. TransCanada Pipeline has applied to build the $7 billion Keystone XL pipeline, an expansion of the existing Keystone Pipeline, to bring oil from Hardisty, Alberta to Port Arthur, Texas, to eventually reach refineries in the US Gulf Coast. It has received Canada's National Energy Board approval to proceed, but the application languishes in the United States, awaiting federal government approval. A second pipeline, the Enbridge Northern Gateway, is awaiting approval from a Joint Review Panel, established by the federal Minister of the Environment and the National Energy Board. The $5.5 billion Northern Gateway project comprises two parts, an oil pipeline from Edmonton to Kitimat B.C., and a new marine terminal to transfer product to ocean bound tankers.

In conjunction, the two pipelines will solve some of Alberta's transportation issues. The Keystone XL line will move more oil to the U.S. market, enabling it to reduce its dependency on Middle East oil. At the same time, the Northern Gateway line will expand Alberta's reach into an increasingly energy-hungry world, particularly Asian markets, reducing Alberta's nearly exclusive dependency on the U.S. as an export market. John Carruthers, President of Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipelines, claims that his pipeline project is as important to Canada's international trade today as the St. Lawrence Seaway project was in the 1950s.

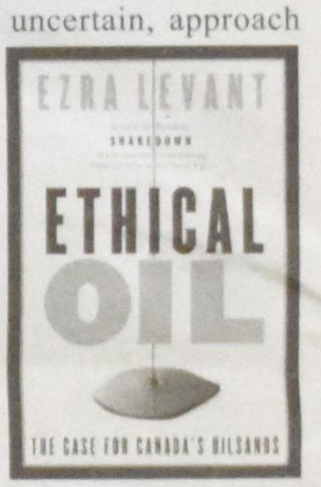
Alberta was looking for significant support for the Gateway project at the recent annual Council of the Federation Meeting (better known as the Premiers Meeting), as it continues to make clear that the economic benefit of oilsands production is nation-wide, including the manufacturing heartland in Ontario and Quebec. While no specific endorsement was given, the Council communiqué stated that "[t]imely development of strategic infrastructure and policies necessary to facilitate trade are crucial if Canada is to compete successfully in Asian markets." Premiers agreed to support and encourage the development and expansion of infrastructure, ports, gateway, and transportation initiatives focusing on our competitive advantages." I am sure there was much debate on the inclusion of the word "gateway" in the communiqué.

Not in my backyard

Some First Nations have spoken strongly against the Gateway project. Five Chiefs of BC First Nations, through whose traditional land the pipeline would pass, signed a joint statement published mid-July in the *Edmonton Journal* indicating their disapproval. Chief Larry Nooski declared that, "Our nations are the wall this pipeline will not break through." The Chiefs expressed concern over the damage potential pipeline and oil tanker spills could cause. This concern is echoed in the criticism the Keystone XL line is receiving in the United States.

Another prominent critique in the U.S. is the accusation that the pipeline will bring "dirty oil" from the tarsands. The Alberta energy industry has still got a long way to go to convince US legislators and regulators that their environmental record will improve. Greater effort must be made in land reclamation, water protection, and carbon emission reduction.

In a unique, but uncertain, approach to countering the negative portrayal of dirty oil in the United States, Ezra Levant, self-described "right-wing guy from Alberta," published *Ethical Oil: the Case for Canada's Oilsands*, last September. His cause has subsequently been taken up by Alykhan Velshi at **EthicalOil.org**. It has recently produced some challenging ads contrasting the human rights abuses of many oil-producing dictatorships, on which the United States depends, against the benefits of producing oil in a democratic society like Canada.



Daniel Clune, the career diplomat leading the American review of the Keystone XL application, would never admit that such ads will affect the U.S. decision-making process, but he has indicated that "the stability of trading partners from whom the US obtains crude oil" is a factor to be considered. Consequently, the success, and failure, of reforms and regime changes arising from the Arab spring in the Middle East may affect the final decision. On July 26, the Republican- dominated House of Representatives passed legislation requiring the Obama administration to make a decision on the Keystone XL pipeline by November 1. The Alberta government certainly welcomes this development, hoping it's a precursor to "unlocking" more exports from its borders, enabling the flow of oilsands production to the U.S. market and then through the Gateway to Asia.

Surmont Oil Sands.

Mike Wevers is an independent consultant, retired from the Alberta Government as an Assistant Deputy Minister. He lives in Edmonton.

Elim Investment Opportunities

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Promissory Notes
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